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Seventy-third year

Provisional

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Monday, 17 September 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea

* Reissued for technical reasons on 19 September 2018.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Japan and the Republic of Korea to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: There have been several positive developments related to the nuclear-weapon and ballistic-missile programmes of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea over recent months. On 20 April, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea announced an immediate halt to nuclear explosive testing and flight tests of certain longer-range ballistic missiles.

On 24 May, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea reportedly dismantled its Punggye-ri nuclear test site. It also reportedly dismantled missile-related infrastructure at the Iha-Ri missile test stand in May and the Sohae satellite launching site in July. However, international experts were not invited to witness any of these activities.

In the meantime, there continue to be signs that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is maintaining and developing its nuclear-weapons and ballistic-missile programmes. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) remains unable to access the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and verify the correctness and completeness of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's declarations under its safeguards agreement. The Agency continues to monitor developments through commercially available satellite imagery where possible. In his regular report to the IAEA Board of Governors and General Conference submitted on 20 August, the IAEA Director General reported that the Agency had observed signatures consistent with the continued operation of the plutonium production reactor, radiochemical laboratory and alleged uranium-enrichment facility at Yongbyon.

The Secretary-General has welcomed the commitment made by Chairman Kim Jong Un of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on 5 September to realize the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

It is hoped that the positive developments that have been seen, together with the important summits between the leaders of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea and between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States, respectively, will contribute to an atmosphere conducive to advancing sustainable peace and complete and verifiable denuclearization on the Korean peninsula in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Security Council unity helped create the opportunity to engage diplomatically. A year ago, the Korean peninsula was the most tense and dangerous peace and security issue in the world. Today, progress has been made on building trust, reducing military tensions and opening or reopening channels of communication. A foundation has been established for making tangible progress on the core issues.

We encourage all Member States to support the parties in their diplomatic efforts and to ensure the full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

I have been asked to brief today on the United Nations Command, which is also referred to as the Unified Command. Security Council resolution 84 (1950), of 7 July 1950, recommended that all Member States providing military forces and other assistance to the Republic of Korea should

> "make such forces and other assistance available to a unified command under the United States of America"

and requested the United States to designate the commander of such forces. The same resolution also authorized the unified command at its discretion to use the United Nations flag in the course of its operations concurrently with the flags of the various nations participating.

In its first report to the Security Council on the operation of the Command, the United States informed the Council that on 25 July 1950 the Unified Command had been established, and the Security Council first used the name "United Nations Command" in resolution 88 (1950), of 8 November 1950. Notwithstanding its name, the United Nations Command is not a United Nations operation or body, nor does it come under the command and control of the United Nations. Furthermore, it was not established as a subsidiary organ of the Security Council and is not funded through the United Nations budget. As such, there are no reporting lines between the United Nations Command and the United Nations Secretariat.

The Secretary-General, during the upcoming high-level week of the General Assembly, will discuss how he and the United Nations system can further support the parties and how steps can be advanced towards sustainable peace, security and the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, in accordance with Security Council resolutions. He hopes that the inter-Korean summit that is starting in a few hours, as well as the planned summit between the leaders of the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, will further contribute to this process.

The President: I thank Ms. DiCarlo for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

Whether international sanctions succeed or fail depends on the difference between words and deeds. Sanctions are just words on a page unless they are effectively enforced. Russia originally called for today's meeting to discuss the implementation of sanctions against North Korea. Then its representatives changed their minds. But we thought that the issue was important enough to bring forward and have a briefing. The United States welcomes the chance to examine the difference between words and deeds. We welcome the opportunity to see whether or not Security Council efforts to eliminate North Korea's nuclear- and ballistic-missile programmes are being honoured and enforced and if not, why.

The measures we adopted last year are something the Security Council should be very proud of. We achieved historic unity by implementing historic sanctions. The Security Council unanimously adopted three major sanctions packages, thereby creating one of the most restrictive sanctions regimes in history. Together, we have also implemented sanctions against dozens of specific North Korean individuals and entities supporting the regime's nuclear- and ballistic-missile programmes. All of us pledged a ban on North Korea's exports and 30 per cent of its imports. All of us promised to uphold the expulsion of all North Korean overseas labourers and stop all joint ventures. We supported a cap on North Korea's imports of oil and other refined petroleum products at 500,000 barrels a year, and a total ban on the export of North Korean coal. We all promised to expel North Korean overseas financial representatives. We agreed that North Korea should not be able to obtain chemical and biological weapons-related materials, and we all agreed to stop international scientific engagement with North Korea. Such sanctions were put in place for a very specific reason — to cut off funding and materials for North Korea's nuclear- and ballistic-missile programmes — because we know that the cash revenue going to North Korea is used to build its weapons programmes, not to help the North Korean people.

The difficult and very sensitive talks with North Korea are ongoing. The Trump-Kim summit has set us on a path to complete denuclearization. But we are not there yet and, until we get there, we must not ease the powerful worldwide sanctions that are in place.

It is important to note that, like the rest of the Security Council, Russia voted in favour of all of the sanctions I just described. Despite that, and despite not having yet come close to the achievement of denuclearization, Russia is now asking to ease the sanctions. Russia originally requested today's meeting for the purpose of criticizing the United States for blocking rail projects it wants to pursue with North Korea. Russia had planned on asking the Security Council to begin to remove sanctions on North Korea so it could pursue a project for its own economic benefit. The question one should ask is: Why? Why after voting in favour of sanctions 11 different times is Russia now backing away from them? We know the answer. It is because Russia has been cheating and has now been caught.

Despite its repeated support for United Nations sanctions, Russia is actively working to undermine the enforcement of the Security Council's sanctions on North Korea. Its violations are not one-offs. They are systematic. Russia has not simply looked the other way as its nationals and entities engage in activities explicitly prohibited by United Nations sanctions; Russia has

engaged in a concerted campaign in the Security Council to cover up violations of sanctions, whether committed by Russia or citizens of other States. The United States has evidence of consistent and wide-ranging Russian violations, which should offend every current and former member of the Security Council that knows how difficult it was to gain passage of those sanctions. It should offend every country that has felt the looming threat of North Korean nuclear weapons.

One of the main ways North Korea cheats is through ship-to-ship transfers of banned items, mainly oil but increasingly coal and other goods. To evade port inspections, oil tankers come together on the high seas. North Koreans use hoses to transfer refined petroleum products to their ships to bring back home. Many tankers are willing to provide oil to make a quick buck. One Russian vessel — the *Patriot* — was captured on film transferring refined petroleum in April this year to a North Korean-controlled vessel that is United Nations-listed. The *Patriot* helped the North Koreans evade sanctions by allowing them to obtain oil on the high seas without having to dock in a port, since the North Korean boat was subject to a global port entry ban.

With our allies and partners, the United States has evidence of many more ships we have uncovered providing oil illegally through ship-to-ship transfers. Just this year, the United States tracked at least 148 instances of oil tankers delivering refined petroleum products obtained through illegal ship-to-ship transfers. We estimate that North Korea obtained at least more than 800,000 barrels of refined petroleum products in the first eight months of the year. That is 160 per cent of the 2018 annual cap of 500,000. In reality, we think it obtained four times the annual quota in the first eight months of the year.

We presented evidence of those violations to the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), which tracks sanctions implementation, but Russia prevented the Committee from declaring that North Korea had exceeded its oil quota. Today, North Korea continues to illegally procure refined petroleum products with the help of Russia. Not only that, when we have pursued United Nations designation of the *Patriot* and other North Korean, Russian and other country flag ships that have been found to be illegally transferring oil, Russia has consistently blocked those designations in the sanctions committee.

It is not just on the high seas that Russia is aiding sanctions evasion. When North Korea assassinated Kim Jong-nam with VX, a deadly nerve agent, the United States moved to strengthen United Nations controls on the flow of North Korean chemical and biological weapons technology. Russia agreed with us in the Security Council but turned around and again blocked the sanctions committee from updating its 12-year-old sanctions list, which is critical to preventing the flow of dangerous weapons of mass destruction-related materials to North Korea. When North Korea began developing intercontinental ballistic missiles to target the United States and other nations with nuclear weapons, we tried to stop it, but even when it came to denying North Korea the means to deliver nuclear weapons, the Russians resisted the enforcement of the sanctions.

The list goes on. Russia agreed with the rest of the Security Council one year ago to sanction a North Korean operative in Moscow who was raising money for weapons programmes, but it never expelled that operative. And when it came time to act, not only did Russia fight to allow the operative to remain in its country, but it is also fighting for him to retain access to his Moscow bank account. For what? Is it to finance his illegal operations in Russia, in violation of the United Nations sanctions? Step by step, sanction by sanction and time and again, Russia works across the board to undermine the sanctions regime.

Last month, the independent Panel of Experts on the implementation of North Korean sanctions submitted its biannual report to the sanctions committee. The report contained evidence of multiple Russian sanctions violations. We have seen and read the report, but when the Panel submitted the report to the Security Council last week, we noticed something deeply troubling. The evidence of Russian violations that was detailed in the earlier report was missing. It has been removed from the open section of the report. Apparently, Russia threatened to prevent the release of the report unless its demands to hide the evidence of its violations were met. To our deep regret, the Panel agreed. That Russian interference was so egregious that the United States had no choice but to prevent the publication of the tainted report.

The United Nations panel of experts reporting process is our most valuable tool for ensuring that sanctions are implemented fully and effectively. It gives the Security Council and the world an impartial

and independent means of ensuring accountability for violators, and a warning to anyone who is considering violation sanctions in the future.

We have seen the Russian tendency to kill the messengers of inconvenient truths before. They did not like it when the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) concluded that Russia's client, the Al-Assad regime, used chemical weapons against its own people in Syria, so they just killed the Mechanism. Now, Russia has succeeded in discrediting the United Nations independent panel reporting process because it called out its violations. Russian corruption is like a virus. It is impeding our ability to achieve complete denuclearization in North Korea. It has now spread to the sanctions reporting process. If we are not careful, the sickness will make its way into the integrity and effectiveness of the Security Council itself.

Finally, let us look at why Russia is so focused on developing railways with North Korea — so focused that it will tell us today that we should remove sanctions. Russia's far-eastern region has few economic opportunities, but coal is one of them. Exporting coal has not been easy without a warm-water seaport. Russians have therefore been leasing the North Korean port of Rason. It poured a lot of money into building that port. We knew it was important for Russia, so we have exempted it five times since 2016.

But that is not enough for Russia. It wants sanctions relief so that it can connect its Trans-Siberian Railway to North Korea to ultimately reach a global port in South Korea. The problem is that it is not time yet to relieve the pressure on North Korea — no matter how lucrative it is for Russia. As we have all agreed, that time comes with denuclearization, and not before. Now is the wrong time to undo all the good work that we have done in the Security Council. Now is the wrong time to ease sanctions pressure on the North Korean regime by repealing sanctions, and it is never the right time to allow cheating to go unpunished. Every time the Security Council overlooks sanctions violations, and every time we allow the Russians to bury evidence of violations, we remove incentives for Pyongyang to end its nuclear programme.

The evidence we have presented today leaves Russia with a choice: it is binary — either it wants sanctions to succeed or it does not, and either it wants to deprive the Pyongyang Government of the means to finance its illegal nuclear weapons system or it does not. Unfortunately, I think that we know the answers to those questions. Either way, the Security Council can no longer be indifferent to Russia's actions. Russia must cease its violations of North Korean sanctions. It must end its concerted effort to cover up evidence of sanctions violations.

The final and fully verified denuclearization of North Korea is the international community's overriding objective. The evidence no longer allows us to take Russia's word that it shares that objective. Russia must now demonstrate by its deeds that it shares our objective in North Korea. The United States calls on all members of the Security Council to join us in demanding that the Panel of Experts submit its original report to the Security Council. Every member of the Council should go on the record on that request. Nothing less than the integrity of the United Nations and our unified approach to North Korea hang in the balance.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing this morning, and I would like to say that I am very happy to see our colleagues from the Republic of Korea and Japan around the table.

The situation on the Korean peninsula has momentous implications for international peace and security. The unity of purpose among Council members in addressing the situation has been decisive for the progress made so far. Continued unity in our approach will be critical to achieving our common objective of the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. The Security Council must stand with the same unity in the implementation of the resolutions we have adopted.

I would like to make three brief points on sanctions, diplomatic efforts and the humanitarian situation.

First, we must effectively implement and uphold the sanctions on North Korea until the demands of the resolutions are fully met. It is with great concern that we see widespread violations of the sanctions regime continue in a range of areas, including arms exports, petroleum trade and financial transactions. We call on all Member States to fulfil their obligations and ensure

their full implementation. We have worked actively in the European Union to ensure that all countries have the necessary guidance and capacity. We commend the thorough work of the Netherlands and the tireless efforts of our dear colleague, Karel Van Oosterom, as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006).

The important work of the Panel of Experts should also be recognized, and we stress the need to respect its independence and impartiality. It is never acceptable for Member States to interfere with the work of the Panel of Experts, seeking to influence its findings and conclusions. That threatens to seriously undermine the integrity of the United Nations independent panel reporting process. Any difference of use should instead be addressed through constructive discussions within the framework of the sanctions Committee.

Secondly, diplomatic efforts and dialogue towards a peaceful solution should be encouraged, acknowledged and supported. We welcome the continued progress in the inter-Korean dialogue and the upcoming summit tomorrow. The inter-Korean family reunion process is also a positive step forward, and we hope that further such reunions can take place soon. The summit between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Singapore in June was very significant.

It is important now that both parties work to maintain momentum and take positive steps. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea should without delay translate its commitments into legally binding undertakings. Signing and ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty would be an important step for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to demonstrate its seriousness. It is also important that the International Atomic Energy Agency get a role early in the verification of the denuclearization and disarmament process. We welcome the fact that the Secretary-General and the United Nations system stand ready to support those diplomatic efforts. Creative diplomacy will also continue to be needed in the next steps.

Lastly, with regard to the humanitarian situation, there is no doubt that the responsibility for the dire humanitarian situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea rests with the Government. At the same time, there are continued concerns about reports of the adverse indirect impacts of sanctions on humanitarian aid delivery and the ability of humanitarian organizations to respond to life-saving humanitarian needs. Enhanced efforts are needed to ensure that the humanitarian exemptions in our resolutions are effectively implemented.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the United States presidency for convening this important meeting on the North Korean issue, which has occupied the Security Council for many years. I also thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, for her very enlightening briefing. I also welcome the Permanent Representatives of the Republic of Korea and Japan.

I would like to make three remarks today on the context, the approach that should guide us and the ultimate objective of denuclearizing the North Korean peninsula, on which we should all come together.

Developments in recent months have contributed to an easing of tensions. The intensification of exchanges among all parties and the relaunch of the inter-Korean dialogue are important and encouraging steps. But let us be clear — we are still awaiting the signs of concrete commitment on the part of the North Korean regime concerning the denuclearization of the peninsula. The International Atomic Energy Agency told us last month that North Korea was pursuing its nuclear programme. It is well known that Pyongyang continues to violate and circumvent sanctions on a larger scale and in an increasingly diversified and sophisticated way. It is also well known that Pyongyang is doing that by exploiting the shortcomings of the system and the gaps in the arrangements made by certain States, and in some cases their lack of will. It is not only a question of sanctions in the area of petrol; all sanctions are involved, from coal to the financial sector.

The report of the Panel of Experts (S/2018/171, annex), which we were able to consider in the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), has confirmed that to us once again. The report also indicates that Pyongyang is pursuing its nuclear and ballistic programmes, in violation of Council resolutions. That observation tells us that there is still a considerable way to go and that we must remain collectively vigilant to the highest degree. That is why the call for unity and resolve that has guided us so far must continue to prevail now more than ever. That requirement should entail three areas of focus in particular.

First, we need the strict, full and simultaneous implementation of the sanctions. We believe that such implementation is more essential than ever to preserve our indispensable leverage over Pyongyang with respect to serious negotiations on the denuclearization of the peninsula. That is the strategy we have defined together, and each of us must stick to it rigorously. Sanctions are not an à la carte menu from which everyone can pick and choose according to their wishes and preferences.

Turning to the second area of focus, we need rigorous monitoring of the actions taken by North Korea through the Committee and the experts who support it. In that respect, I wish to assure them and the Dutch chairmanship of the Committee of our full support. The Committee and the corresponding Panel of Experts are the most effective means of providing impartial information and of encouraging all States to comply strictly with their obligations. Their publicly available reports are also an essential tool for verifying the implementation of sanctions and for deterring anyone, including North Korea, from engaging in activities that would undermine the sanctions.

In that regard, France regrets the obstructions to the Panel's latest report. It is essential that expert panel reports be published without interference. Let us be clear. The professionalism and the quality of the work of the experts are measured neither by our satisfaction with their content nor by the a posteriori consideration of our views. The independence and integrity of the panels of experts are the DNA of sanction regimes, and there can be no question of altering or manipulating them. I wish to stress here France's extreme vigilance against any attempt at manipulation.

Turning to the third area of focus, we must be ready to toughen sanctions if necessary. They remain the best tool at our disposal to maintain the necessary pressure and send a signal of resolve to the regime. That is why we fully support United States efforts in that respect.

In conclusion, denuclearization discussions must clearly continue, but certainly not at the cost of relaxing our efforts. It is up to the North Korean regime to demonstrate through concrete gestures that it is sincerely ready to commit to the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the peninsula. That must remain more than ever our common goal. France remains resolutely committed to its partners in that respect, both here and in the framework of the European Union. I call on the members of the Council to remain united in achieving this essential goal for international peace and security. It is my hope that the General Assembly will help us to move in that direction together at its next session.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. DiCarlo, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for her briefing.

Since the beginning of the year, thanks to the joint efforts of the various parties concerned, the situation on the Korean peninsula has undergone positive changes. The issue of the peninsula has returned to the correct track of settlement through dialogue and consultation. The leaders of the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have met, marking a crucial step towards a political settlement of the peninsula's nuclear issue. China supports the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in resolving the nuclear issue on the peninsula through dialogue and consultations, and wishes to see both countries duly implement the outcome of their summit meeting in a continuous push for a political solution of the peninsula's issue.

China supports the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea in maintaining dialogue and engagement and in pressing ahead with reconciliation and cooperation in a sustained manner. It is our wish that the summit in Pyongyang between the leaders of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and of the Republic of Korea will run smoothly and yield positive results. China commends the important efforts of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to achieve the denuclearization of the peninsula and to maintain peace there. We hope that all parties concerned will work in synergy to consolidate the momentum of dialogue and rapprochement on the peninsula and jointly move the peace process on the peninsula forward for lasting peace and stability in the region.

Looking back on the evolution of events from several rounds of escalation of tensions on the peninsula since 2016 to a series of positive changes in the peninsula's situation this year, we draw three important lessons from that experience to inform and guide us.

First, we must uphold the goal of denuclearization. Making the peninsula nuclear-free is the essential requirement for lasting peace on and stability of the peninsula and an imperative for safeguarding the international nuclear non-proliferation system. The measures taken on the part of the Democratic People's

Republic of Korea, such as the cessation of nuclear- and ballistic-missile tests and the dismantling of nuclear-test sites, have demonstrated its good will to push for the denuclearization of the peninsula and build mutual trust with the relevant parties. That is helpful to the political settlement of the issue on the peninsula. We hope that all parties concerned will show political wisdom and work together in a tangible manner for a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

Secondly, we must persevere in maintaining peace and stability on the peninsula. Central to the peninsula's issue is the question of security. It is imperative to address the legitimate security concerns of the parties concerned in a proper and balanced manner in order to safeguard peace and stability on the peninsula in earnest. There is no military solution to the peninsula's issue, and confrontation is a dead end. Resorting to force will bring nothing but disastrous consequences to the peninsula. The suspension of the joint military exercises conducted by the United States and the Republic of Korea will help ease the situation on the peninsula. It is up to the parties concerned to continue to make the sensible choice.

Thirdly, we must strive to resolve issues through dialogue and consultation. History shows that dialogue and negotiation are essential means for promoting the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and for maintaining regional peace and stability. The positive progress in the dialogue and exchange between the North and the South on the peninsula and the summit between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea clearly bear witness to the necessity and the effectiveness of dialogue and consultation.

China has always been committed to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, to the maintenance of peace and stability on the peninsula and to the resolution of issues through dialogue and consultation. That position has always remained steadfast and will continue to do so in the future. As a close neighbour of the peninsula, China has maintained close engagement and coordination with the parties concerned in a responsible way, while promoting peace talks and working tirelessly to resolve the nuclear issue on the peninsula through negotiation. Our role in that regard has been constructive. In the light of the developing situation on the peninsula, China proposed a dual-track approach and the suspension-for-suspension initiative. The former refers to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in parallel to establishing a peace mechanism on the peninsula. Suspension for suspension envisions the Democratic People's Republic of Korea suspending nuclear and ballistic missile activities and the United States and the Republic of Korea suspending large-scale military exercises. China and Russia have also developed a road map for resolving the peninsula issue.

With regard to implementing the Security Council resolutions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, China has consistently and fully fulfilled its international obligations. Whenever the Security Council adopted a resolution on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Chinese authorities concerned issued a timely notice for the implementation of the relevant measures on the ground. In accordance with the provisions of the resolution, China submitted an implementation report in a timely manner and regularly reported the crude oil supplied and the refined petroleum products exported to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

It should be recalled that China has actively participated in the work of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006). China will never allow Chinese citizens or enterprises to engage in any activity that contravenes Security Council resolutions. China will address any act found to have violated such resolutions and Chinese laws and regulations in line with the relevant laws and regulations. China's serious attitude towards implementing Security Council resolutions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the significant cost to our country are clear to all. The reality has shown that China's proposed approach and initiative represent the right direction. The results are significant and are in the common interests of all the parties concerned. China has always constructively striven to promote the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. China will work with all the relevant parties to establish a nuclear-free, stable and prosperous Korean peninsula.

The current situation on the Korean peninsula is two-fold: there is a rare historic opportunity but also challenges. The parties concerned should make efforts in the following areas.

First, they should strive for progress in terms of dialogue and negotiation. In accordance with the phased and synchronized approach and as a package resolution, the denuclearization process of the Korean peninsula should be coherently linked to and coordinated with the

process of establishing a peace mechanism in order to achieve early results as soon as possible.

Secondly, the overarching direction towards a political resolution should be maintained. We hope that the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to maintain the momentum for dialogue and that they will properly resolve their differences on the basis of the existing consensus, meet each other halfway, take each other's concerns into account, continue to strengthen mutual trust and persevere in the negotiation process until it yields results and establishes peace.

Thirdly, in order to fully and comprehensively implement Security Council resolutions in the correct way, we must not only step up non-proliferation measures to promote the denuclearization of the peninsula but also actively strengthen the political and diplomatic approach in order to resolve the issue peacefully, while avoiding an adverse impact on the humanitarian and civilian needs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. China is ready to continue to provide the necessary support and assistance to humanitarian activities in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Security Council resolutions clearly stipulate that, in the light of the progress on the denuclearization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the reversible provision should be considered and the corresponding actions taken at the appropriate time. That complies with the spirit of the resolutions and facilitates the denuclearization process.

In the current context, the Security Council should remain united, meet its historic responsibilities and strive for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and lasting peace and stability in North-East Asia. China stands ready to work with the various relevant parties within the international community and to continue to play a positive and constructive role for a nuclear-free Korean peninsula in the interests of peace and stability on the peninsula.

Last but not least, in her briefing Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo referred to what is known as the United Nations Command. I would like to affirm China's position in that regard. China is of the view that the so-called United Nations Command is a product of the Cold War era. Its name does not reflect the reality. It is not legitimate and brings to mind overtones of military confrontation. The so-called United Nations Command has long been anachronistic. It should not become an obstacle to reconciliation and cooperation between the South and the North of the peninsula.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait): Before I begin my statement, I would like to convey our heartfelt condolences to the victims of Hurricane Florence. Our thoughts are with their families and loved ones and with everyone in the Carolinas as they weather that storm. I would also like to convey our heartfelt condolences to, and solidarity with, China and the Philippines.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

They are also facing similar devastating storms, which demonstrate the dangers resulting from the phenomenon of climate change.

At the outset, I would like to thank you, Madam President, for having convened this meeting to discuss the agenda item "Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea". The request to hold today's meeting reflects your ongoing efforts in the area of denuclearization and your commitment to ridding the Korean peninsula from nuclear weapons. We would also like to thank Ms. DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for her briefing.

The issues of non-proliferation and weapons of mass destruction have always posed the gravest challenge to the responsibility that we bear for maintaining international peace and security. We are only nine days away from returning to the Chamber for a high-level meeting to consider the threat of those weapons to our world today, as well as to discuss the main tools at the disposal of the United Nations to limit such weapons and ensure international peace and security.

A few months ago, the situation on the Korean peninsula represented the most tense and dangerous situation with regard to peace and security. We all were concerned about the risk of military confrontation. However, those fears began gradually to subside after sincere diplomatic initiatives that resulted in the convening of two presidential summits in just two months. We look forward to the success of the summit between the two Koreas that will be held tomorrow. The resulting understandings in that regard were supported by Kuwait and the entire international community in order to achieve the desired goal of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and achieving peace between the two Koreas.

It is also important to underline that those diplomatic initiatives followed a series of resolutions

adopted by the Security Council. The coherence and unity of the Security Council have played a leading role in condemning all the illegal programmes and activities by North Korea, whether they be nuclear programmes or others related to ballistic missiles. It is critical that the Security Council remains united, firm and resolute in fully implementing all its relevant resolutions.

My country's delegation followed closely over the past two months the discussions in the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006). I would like to first underline our appreciation for the great efforts made by our colleague the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, Ambassador Karel van Oosterom, Chair of the Committee, and then to underline our appreciation for the professionalism of the members of his Mission. We underscore the concerns of all parties involved, but the discussions that took place in that Committee over the past two weeks and what ensued were unfortunate and a source of concern for my country with regard to the possibility that the unity of the Council on this matter could be lost.

We call upon all parties to transcend our differences and assume our responsibilities for maintaining international peace and security. Adherence to the rules of procedure and safeguarding the independence of reports issued by groups of experts are matters that govern our work in the Organization. As Chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, I am well aware that there is an urgent need to modify many of the matters affecting the work of the Council. However, until we are able to introduce the modifications that will improve the performance and work of the Council, we have no other choice but to work through the established procedures.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, as the Ambassador of Kuwait did, allow me to express our most heartfelt condolences for the victims of Hurricane Florence and other natural disasters in other parts of the world.

We also wish to welcome the representatives of Japan and Korea to this morning's debate. We thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting, as well as Ms. DiCarlo for her informative briefing.

On 30 August, the Security Council gathered to hear the briefing on the midterm report of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006). At its most recent meeting on this topic, the Council ended up discussing the reasons behind the blocking of the report as well as some members' disagreement about certain aspects of its content. As we have always said, we believe that the members of the Council know better than anyone the difficulties we encounter in discharging our mandate when we lack unanimity among our members. That is why we call for the work and decisions of the Committee to be reached by consensus. The same is true for the case under consideration — we must ensure that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea scrupulously adheres to and implements the sanctions unanimously adopted by the Council.

After the hopeful developments concerning the commitment to denuclearize the Korean peninsula expressed in April by the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kim Jong-un, alongside his counterpart, Moon Jae-in, President of the Republic of Korea, and later in Singapore during the June meeting with Donald Trump, President of the United States of America, with agreements that included a set of principles to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea hopes that the leaders of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will honour those voluntarily agreed commitments and seek continued cooperation with the Security Council in order to fulfil its obligations under the Council's resolutions.

We are here to do what is right, namely, to promote international peace and security. As such, we must respect and truly analyse the information or concerns advanced by any member of the Council. In the case under consideration, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea will always promote international law, nuclear non-proliferation and negotiation. Those elements will always guide our position.

We must come to an immediate and common understanding of the aspects that affected the stalemate in the negotiations undertaken in June and April between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, respectively, on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

The world's nuclear weapons, many of them on instant alert, continue to be counted in the thousands. If we want to prevent cascading nuclear proliferation, we need a major international effort and a sincere will to destroy them all. That is the position of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea — we must destroy all

nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction in order for the world to live in peace and tranquility without having to fear the constant threat posed by such weapons.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to echo the Kuwaiti and Equatorial Guinea representatives in sending our condolences to all those around the world who have been affected by the recent hurricanes and flooding. I think the Kuwaiti representative was quite right in pointing out the link with climate change. It is one reason that the Security Council needs to stay abreast of developments on climate change. I thank him for raising that point.

I have listened very carefully to what colleagues have said this morning. The unity of the Council has been critical on this issue, all the more so because on other issues, including those relating to weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), Council action has been blocked because of one Council member. We have a very significant opportunity to improve the strategic situation on the Korean peninsula. I think the Swedish representative referred to it as momentous, and I think that is exactly the right word to use. What is happening on the Korean peninsula has the potential to affect the countries of the two colleagues sitting at the table, but if we can get it right — if we can succeed at non-proliferation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — then we can improve the safety and security of the region and the entire world.

You said, Madam President, that the Council had adopted historic sanctions, showing historic unity. We have a real chance for success, and I find it very hard to comprehend why anyone, why one Council member, would put that opportunity at risk given what is at stake. The Chinese Ambassador referred to the 1950s and the Cold War. We do not debate how the Democratic People's Republic of Korea came to have nuclear weapons, but we all agree that it is vital to achieve denuclearization there. I will come back to that point in a minute, but it is a very serious issue. It has been hanging over the region and the world since the 1950s, and the Council has been united recently in trying to tackle it. We would appeal to all Council members to not put that unity at risk, but to continue efforts.

I want to thank the Under-Secretary-General for her briefing. I think there have been, as she said, some important political developments. We welcome the upcoming trip of President Moon Jae-in, and we hope it will further encourage the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to take decisive steps towards denuclearization. I did want to add, in that context, that there is no equivalence between WMD possession and threats to use them and the various bilateral cooperative military exercises that we have seen between the United States and the Republic of Korea.

I would like to echo other speakers before me in noting the fact that next week our leaders will be here for high-level week. These important questions will be discussed. People will be looking at the Council even more than usual to see our leaders take their responsibilities and deliver unity and progress so that this critical issue of WMD and nuclear proliferation can be properly addressed.

Turning to sanctions, all evidence related to sanctions implementation is reviewed with care, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's neighbouring States have a particular responsibility. Our unanimously agreed sanctions measures clearly draw a distinction between legitimate economic activity and sanctionable offences. I very much welcome the assurances that the Chinese Ambassador set out today.

We particularly need monitoring of coal and oil exports to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, for the reasons you, Madam President, set out when speaking in your national capacity. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has shown itself able to seek creative ways to bypass checks and violate sanctions. We support the United States assessment that the Security Council-mandated cap on imports of refined petroleum has likely been breached. We need to be vigilant about that aspect, which includes ship-to-ship transfers of refined petroleum to vessels of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at sea. The cap demonstrates international commitment to upholding the rules-based international order. We call on all States, but particularly, given their special nuclear responsibilities, the permanent five members of the Security Council, to ensure that agreed sanctions are adhered to.

You, Madam President, mentioned the Panel of Experts, and a number of colleagues have also referred to it. We think it is important that the report of the Panel of Experts should be submitted in its usual form. The Panel has produced an extensive and well-researched report, showing the extent of sanctions evasion by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Security

Council has unanimously agreed a comprehensive set of resolutions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and publication of these reports is one of the commitments we have all signed up to. We therefore look to all colleagues on the Council to enforce those commitments strictly, and I would like to stress that reporting by the independent Panel is an essential tool for carrying out sanctions implementation to the full and ensuring that evasions are clamped down upon.

On the United Nations Command, I take the points that have been made about history. As a number of colleagues have said, it is a legacy from the 1950s, and it is highly unusual. All requests for shipments of material in the demilitarized zone must be scrutinized and checked for compliance with sanctions. It is important that such diligence continue.

There has been really important outreach both by your Government, Madam President, and by the Government of the Republic of Korea, but, sadly, Pyongyang has not yet taken decisive steps towards complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization. The Council debate next week will be a very important window of opportunity that should not be wasted. The United Kingdom is fully committed to supporting and assisting denuclearization in any way that we can. I hope that next week we can see very strong and firm Council unity in support of that goal and in support of full sanctions implementation.

Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks the United States presidency of the Security Council for the initiative of today's briefing on the status of implementation of the sanctions regime for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. My delegation also thanks Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for her very informative briefing.

Like others, I would like to express the condolences of my country and my delegation to the Government and the people of the United States for the consequences of Hurricane Florence's devastating sweep through certain states of the country, including yours, Madam President. More generally, I would like to express my country's and my delegation's condolences to all peoples who have suffered the consequences of climate change in recent times. All of those consequences serve to underline once again the need to awaken and prepare our collective consciousness for the fight against such climate disruptions.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the signs towards a resolution that have been seen on the Korean peninsula. Since the beginning of the year, these signs materialized in a series of important events, culminating in the historic summit held on 12 June in Singapore between the Presidents of the United States and North Korea. The meeting will undoubtedly be remembered as the event that would capture the attention of the international community and raise real hopes, given the risks of a military confrontation with potentially disastrous consequences.

My country congratulates all those responsible for those achievements and looks forward with great interest to the conclusions of the third summit to be held in less than a year between the North and South Korean leaders, which is scheduled for 18 to 20 September. Accordingly, Côte d'Ivoire urges the leaders of the two countries to continue along the path of dialogue and expresses the hope that the upcoming meeting will lead to the taking of concrete steps towards the signing of a peace treaty between the two countries, which would obviously constitute an important step towards the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. In that regard, my delegation would like to express its satisfaction with the opening of a joint liaison office on 14 September, which is an important milestone on the path towards the reciprocal opening of diplomatic missions.

Notwithstanding those positive developments, my delegation remains concerned about the impasse in the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), following the presentation of the midterm report of the Panel of Experts on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The report, which endorses the work of the Group of Experts and whose publication has been awaited for weeks, is now a source of contention among some members of the Committee. With regard to the main blocking factor, my delegation is of the view that it is essential, for the better implementation of paragraph 5 of resolution 2397 (2017), that all members of the Security Council agree on how to calculate the quantity of refined oil that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is allowed to import during each 12-month period. The lack of consensus on the issue is not only likely to hinder the effective implementation of resolution 2397 (2017), but it also has a negative impact on developments on the ground, thereby undermining hopes for the early denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

That is why Côte d'Ivoire calls on all parties to engage in dialogue and compromise in order to safeguarde the unity that has long prevailed among the members of our Council on the North Korean issue, particularly during the voting, in December 2017, on resolution 2397 (2017), which strengthened the sanctions regime. In addition, my country would like for the independence of the Panel of Experts to be preserved in order to guarantee the impartiality and objectivity of its investigations and the relevance of its recommendations.

Reports from various and consistent sources of recurrent violations of the Security Council sanctions regime by North Korea, through illicit oil transhipment operations, illicit arms trade and illegal financial transactions, are a cause of great concern. They reflect the porosity of the sanctions mechanisms that have been put in place and point to the magnitude of the multiple challenges to be overcome in the effective implementation of the sanctions regime. My delegation would also like to express its concern about extending the deadlines for the consideration of humanitarian exemptions. In our view, it is crucial the right balance be struck between the implementation of sanctions and humanitarian imperatives, as several humanitarian organizations recently sounded the alarm bell on the need to ensure food security in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea following the severe drought.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate Côte d'Ivoire's commitment to our enduring common objective of the total denuclearization of the Korean peninsula as an indispensable precondition for peaceful coexistence among the States of the region. My country therefore encourages all stakeholders to show their resolute commitment to safeguard the gains in the interests of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We join others in expressing our solidarity with, and sympathy for, the victims of Hurricane Florence and other natural disasters around the world, which are becoming ever more frequent and intense as a result of climate change.

We want to thank you, Madam President, for having organized this meeting, and Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing.

Peru notes with deep concern the serious threat to international peace and security posed by the nuclear and ballistic-missile programme of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, the nuclear non-proliferation regime and specific decisions of the Security Council. That programme and all related activities must be completely abandoned in a verifiable and irreversible manner. Until that occurs, the sanctions imposed by the Council must remain in force and be universally implemented. Peru implements them within its jurisdiction and believes that the Security Council must remain vigilant and adequately respond to any possible non-compliance, wherever it may occur.

We wish to underscore the unity and commitment of the Security Council on this matter. We attach the greatest importance to maintaining that unity and commitment with a view to achieving the ultimate objective of the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

At the same time, we commend the high-level diplomacy conducted by the authorities of the Republic of Korea and the United States aimed at building the trust required to alleviate tensions, reduce the risk of miscalculations or misunderstandings and, ultimately, achieve denuclearization.

In that regard, we stress that the sanctions regime is a tool for bringing the North Korean Government to the negotiating table, and should not lead to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the country or restrict access to the assistance the civilian population needs.

Finally, regarding existing discrepancies in compliance with the restrictions on refined petroleum products, and the transfer of such to North Korean vessels, we must express our concern and underscore the need for strict respect for the provisions of resolution 2375 (2017).

In conclusion, we commend the work carried out by the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), our colleague Ambassador van Oosterom, and underscore the need to safeguard the independence of the Committee's Panel of Experts.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to join my colleagues in expressing my solidarity and sympathy with those affected by the devastating force of the hurricane in the United States and the typhoon in Asia. They have our full support.

I would also like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo for her very informative briefing and to welcome the presence among us of our colleagues the Permanent Representatives of the Republic of Korea and Japan.

This meeting is an opportunity to prove the Security Council's unity and strong will to uphold the implementation of the United Nations sanctions imposed on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Those measures will not be effective unless they are being implemented honestly by all States.

The sanctions regime serves the sole purpose of limiting possible avenues for financing of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's illegal military activities. As soon as a political solution regarding nuclear disarmament and the ballistic-missile programme of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is achieved, restrictive measures can be eased. But, in order to reach such an agreement, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has yet to take concrete steps that prove its genuine will to denuclearize.

Poland is deeply concerned that Pyongyang has not stopped its nuclear and ballistic missiles programmes and continues to defy Security Council resolutions in an increasingly sophisticated manner. That includes illicit ship-to-ship transfers of petroleum products but also attempted supplies of arms and other military equipment to countries across the Middle East, continued abuse by diplomats of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of their status abroad, and other evasion practices.

We reiterate our position that, despite political and legal difficulties, it is mandatory for all States without exception to comply with obligations arising from the Security Council resolutions.

Peace on the Korean peninsula can be achieved only through dialogue. We welcomed the diplomatic process related to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, marked by historic summits in Panmunjom and Singapore earlier this year. We look forward to the third summit this year between the leaders of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, beginning tomorrow in Pyongyang. We hope that event will help to reinvigorate and maintain dialogue on the peninsula.

Poland expresses full support and gratitude to Ambassador Karel van Oosterom as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) and his team for their hard work. We appreciate his efforts to ensure the greatest possible transparency in the Committee's processes.

Poland firmly believes that work of the 1718 Committee is instrumental to the achievement of comprehensive, verifiable and irreversible disarmament on the Korean peninsula. We were therefore disappointed that the midterm report of the Committee's Panel of Experts has not yet been published. In recent weeks, we have witnessed a dispute that is not only procedural, regarding the validity of certain formulations in the report. The sanctions regime imposed on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has crucial meaning for regional and global peace and security, and reports of the Panel of Experts play an important role in implementation of the Security Council's resolutions. We are gravely concerned by the fact that there were attempts to actively interfere with the conclusions of the midterm report after it had been submitted to the Committee. To effectively implement the sanctions regime, it is crucial to uphold the independence and impartiality of the Panel of Experts. We also believe that the credibility of the Panel's reports requires that, once established, facts should not be negotiated. Each and every country has the right to disagree with the conclusions of the Panel, but that should not be to the detriment of the Panel's independence.

Reports of that body, acting under auspices of the United Nations, are perceived by a majority of States as the leading source of impartial information on the current status of the implementation of sanctions. It is therefore important to avoid ambiguity in the conclusions of the Panel's reports, as that may have potentially devastating effects for the effective implementation of sanctions.

Let me conclude by making a general remark concerning procedures applicable in work of the subsidiary bodies of the Security Council.

Recent developments concerning the 1718 Committee prove that Chairs of sanctions committees need to have more flexibility in their activities. The current guidelines of the subsidiary bodies, which are much more restrictive than the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, often do not leave room for action by the Chair, even on procedural issues. That situation can be easily used to obstruct the work of the Committees.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I would first like to thank you, Madam President, for convening this

important meeting. We also thank Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing.

Let me repeat the words of condolence expressed by our Kuwaiti colleague to you, Madam President, and to our colleagues from China and the Philippines.

I will focus on three aspects in my statement: first, the ongoing diplomatic efforts; secondly, the need for full and effective sanctions implementation; and thirdly, the work of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) and its Panel of Experts.

Let me also welcome to the Security Council our colleagues from Japan and the Republic of Korea.

With regard to my first point, the Kingdom of the Netherlands supports the ongoing diplomatic talks with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We hope that further steps can be taken during the upcoming inter-Korean summit as well as during a possible second summit between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. There are obvious challenges inherent to such complex talks, but no efforts, in our view, should be spared towards the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

Secondly, with regard to the need for the full implementation of the sanctions, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should take meaningful steps to address the concerns of the Council. Those concerns are spelled out in the pertinent resolutions. Until those concerns are adequately addressed, the international community should maintain its pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In our view, it is therefore too early to talk about sanctions relief. Furthermore, current developments are a reason for concern. Let me mention some examples: first, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, which remain a global threat; secondly, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to actively evade sanctions in order to advance those programmes; and, thirdly, several countries are not fully implementing the sanctions.

Let me give some concrete examples about the latter. First, there is an increase in illicit ship-to-ship transfers of petroleum products to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; secondly, there is ongoing use of front companies and Democratic People's Republic of Korea diplomats to evade financial sanctions; and, thirdly, there are attempts by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to supply arms and military equipment to actors in the Middle East. Those developments are very concerning. They should be a matter of grave concern to the entire international community, and especially to all members of the Council. We therefore call on all States Members of the United Nations to fully and effectively implement United Nations sanctions. In my capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), I will continue to do my utmost towards that end, together with my team.

That brings me to my third point, namely, the important role of the 1718 Committee and its Panel of Experts in that context. With the most recent Security Council resolutions, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea sanctions regime has grown to be the most comprehensive sanctions regime to date, and it is likely also the most complicated to date. The 1718 Committee plays a crucial role in implementing the resolutions by taking appropriate action in cases of sanctions violations, by providing guidance and support to the wider United Nations membership and by minimizing adverse humanitarian consequences of the sanctions.

The activities of the Panel of Experts, and particularly its reports, serve as a cornerstone of the United Nations sanctions regime on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It is crucial that the Panel of Experts can work fully and independently. All Member States should fully respect the independence of the Panel of Experts. The Panel's reports are crucial for the decision-making of the Committee and the Council, and its reports are key for engagement with third countries. The public release of those reports is important in order to maintain the pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We express our support for the work of the Panel. With the expansion of the sanctions regime, the task of the Panel of Experts has become ever-more challenging. We would like to emphasize how crucial it is that the Panel can do its job in an effective and secure manner with full autonomy. The integrity of the Panel of Experts must be safeguarded.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands supports the ongoing diplomatic efforts. It is necessary to maintain pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea through the full implementation of sanctions by all Member States. The 1718 Committee and its Panel of Experts play an important role in that respect.

Let me emphasize, as others have done, the importance of the unity of the Council in all of those efforts. A united Council has a tremendous impact. The stakes are too high for the Council to be divided on that matter.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We join others who have expressed their condolences for the victims of the natural disasters that have taken place in the past few weeks.

We also thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for her briefing.

Bolivia categorically reaffirms its commitment to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and to their elimination and prevention in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the Security Council. In that context, we call upon all so-called nuclear-weapon States to take immediate action to eliminate their nuclear and ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner in compliance with Security Council resolutions.

With regard to the situation on the Korean peninsula, we reaffirm our commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1718 (2006) and subsequent resolutions. In that context, we have been strengthening national inter-institutional coordination mechanisms so that their implementation is effective and fully in line with their mandates. We also underscore the summit to be held in Pyongyang tomorrow, and we hope that it will be a step forward with respect to the commitments that must be fulfilled within a framework of consensus.

We reiterate that, for Bolivia, sanctions should not be an end in themselves, but rather should serve to bring the parties closer to the negotiating table and to a transparent dialogue where primacy is given only to the will to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict. My delegation is concerned that the imposition of sanctions has a direct impact on the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, who, as we have heard on a number of occasions, have suffered from many shortages, especially with regard to health care and other aspects.

We reiterate the importance of complying with the Charter of the United Nations, under which the Security Council is the sole legal body that can take the necessary measures to maintain or restore international peace and security, thereby ruling out any unilateral action. In that regard, we once again express our full support for a negotiated settlement between the parties leading to the full denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. To that end, we are pleased about the progress made in the inter-Korean dialogue, which began with a bilateral summit held in the Joint Security Area between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and which concluded with the signing of the Panmunjom Declaration on Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula on 27 April.

It is also important to note that, since that signing, significant progress has been made in the process of rapprochement between the two States, such as with the family reunions promoted by both States, which took place on 20 August, during which at least 180 families saw each other again after more than 60 years of forced separation following the Korean War.

Finally, we express optimism that, in accordance with international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the inter-Korean meetings and talks, as well as the rapprochement between the highest authorities of the relevant parties and the high-level summit held in Singapore on 12 June between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States, made it possible for them to join efforts in building a peaceful and stable regime on the Korean peninsula. We view this and other signals as the most important steps towards paving the way for a peace agreement that could put an end to this conflict.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We join other in expressing our sympathy to all those who suffered from the devastating hurricanes here in the United States, in the Carolinas, as well as in the Philippines and China.

We thank the United States delegation for having convened today's meeting and Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her valuable update. We are also glad to see our colleagues from South Korea and Japan at this table.

Since this is the first public meeting this year on the issue, I would like to briefly express my country's position regarding the developments taking place on the Korean peninsula.

Unlike in the past, this year there have been many positive and historic events that demonstrate the relevance of the chosen path of political and diplomatic efforts. We can say that this is a perfect example of the spirit of creating and strengthening confidence-building

measures, which are the optimal and most pragmatic way of resolving bilateral and multilateral issues.

This is exactly what my President called for at the January high-level thematic briefing of the Security Council on non-proliferation and confidence-building measures (see S/PV.8160). He believes that this is an essential element in maintaining the global security architecture and strengthening peace. He has always been convinced that all conflicts and problematic issues related to weapons of mass destruction should be resolved through confidence-building and trust.

I would recall that President Nursultan Nazarbayev also stressed the need to resolve the issue of North Korea's nuclear programme by restoring these missing elements, especially among the United States, Russia and China. We would not like to see the contrary occur, which could send the wrong signal.

Unity in the Council must be preserved and used to achieve the overarching task at hand: the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Kazakhstan supports the work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), which is called upon to achieve this task by exclusively peaceful and political means. We acknowledge that sanctions in this regard are only interim measures until tangible steps on verified denuclearization have been taken on the ground in North Korea.

We recognize that the workload of the Group of Experts of the 1718 Committee is of the broadest scope and also the most complex. It is entirely permissible for the content and conclusions of the Panel's report to, at the same time, cause some controversy and disagreements among the Member States. We underline in this regard that it is not only important but imperative to ensure full proof and the veracity of all the facts and evidence as well as statistical data. This is crucial in order to elaborate proper recommendations and further measures.

As for the controversial points that have caused disagreements among some members of the Council, we hope that a speedy settlement can be reached on the basis of mutual respect and patience. Only then we can seek a common understanding and a pragmatic and comprehensive solution.

Today the situation on the Korean peninsula is much better and more favourable than ever before and prompts us to focus more on further developing goodwill, openness and mutual concessions.

Kazakhstan, which has practical personal experience in disarmament, understands how complex the process of denuclearization is. We therefore hope that the parties will be able to remain patient, redouble their determination and political will, and bring to bear extraordinary diplomatic skills and resources in order to successfully move towards achieving a denuclearized Korean peninsula.

We are firmly committed to the cause of nuclear disarmament and are ready to contribute in the most constructive way to all possible collective efforts in this direction.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): Madam President, we thank you for having convened this meeting and express our appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing.

May I also join my colleagues in expressing our deep sorrow and condolences to you, Madam, and to the Government and the people of the United States on the loss of life resulting from Hurricane Florence. Our condolences also go to China and the Philippines, and our prayers and thoughts are with the families that lost loved ones.

I also wish to welcome our colleagues from Japan and the Republic of Korea.

I understand that the Council had the opportunity to discuss the issue of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea last month. We all have been observing the developments following the recent summit meetings, whose outcome had given us some sense of hope for progress towards the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the advancement of peace in North-East Asia.

There may indeed be challenges in the area of implementation, and we understand that this will not be an easy task. We hope that all the relevant parties will maintain the momentum generated recently with a view to finding a comprehensive and peaceful diplomatic and political solution to the issue of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that is in line with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The Council must continue to support such endeavours. In this regard, the talks on a follow-up summit between the leaders of the United States and

the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as plans for the holding of a third inter-Korean summit, are encouraging.

In the meantime, the implementation of the sanctions regime remains critical. We have noted from the recent mid-term report of the Panel of Experts that there have been implementation gaps in relation to the sanctions imposed by the Council. In this regard, the work of the Panel of Experts of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) continues to contribute significantly to the full implementation of the Council's resolutions. This calls for continued cooperation on the part of Member States and for support for the work of the Panel of Experts.

Finally, preserving the unity of the Council in addressing the issue of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remains of vital importance. We should continue to encourage dialogue and the quest for a comprehensive diplomatic solution, with the ultimate objective of achieving the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I, too, like my colleagues, wish to begin by expressing my deep condolences to all of those who suffered from the effects of the natural disasters in the United States, China and the Philippines.

I wish also to thank Ms. DiCarlo for her briefing.

Madam President, you suggested that we hold a Security Council meeting today in an open format; all the better, because we wanted to draw attention to the fact that Russia, China and other members of the Security Council have tried on many occasions, since progress was made in inter-Korean reconciliation, to initiate a positive reaction of any kind on the part of the Security Council to those events. I would recall that six months ago we would sometimes meet twice a week in order to discuss yet another launch of a ballistic missile by Pyongyang. But today we are already talking about the prospect of signing a peace treaty and the final rapprochement between the South and the North.

I would like the American delegation to explain to us and all other Members of the United Nations why it is opposed to the issuance by the Council of a presidential statement in support of these positive developments. It is blocking even such a reaction as press elements and refusing to issue any kind of a positive statement.

We have repeatedly stated that we fully support the negotiation process that began at the beginning of this year between the parties concerned. Russia also welcomes what has already been achieved: a reduction in military activity and the establishment of direct contact between the leaders of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea and the United States.

A liaison office for the two Koreas opened several days ago in Kaesong. We also hope for a successful outcome to the summit set to begin tomorrow in Pyongyang between the leaders of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea.

At the same time, we are seeing today that the negotiations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States are at the very least encountering certain difficulties. The negotiating process is a two-way street. Diplomacy in the twenty-first century, or in any century, for that matter, is such that it is impossible to come to an agreement if one party offers nothing in return for its demands.

No one doubts the fact that a nuclear-missile programme in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is unacceptable. However, what else can be expected when Pyongyang is called upon to comply unconditionally with all conditions under empty promises? The world has already had the opportunity to contemplate the price of such promises in May, when the current United States Administration decided that agreements reached by its predecessors under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action were bad and made the unilateral decision to withdraw from it. Thus, the promises made not only to Tehran but also to the international community were all broken.

The path to denuclearization must begin with the strengthening of confidence-building measures. For example, one such measure could be the signing of a peace treaty to end the war in Korea. We see that both Pyongyang and Seoul have already come quite close to achieving that goal. Restrictive measures imposed by Security Council resolutions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea cannot be an end in themselves. They should be a tool to engage the country in constructive negotiations. It is impossible to resolve the Korean peninsula's nuclear problem only through sanctions and pressure on Pyongyang. Sanctions cannot replace diplomacy.

With regard to the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), the delegation of the United States has intentionally heightened tensions surrounding the issue of submission to the Council of the interim report of the Panel of Experts of the North Korean sanctions committee, and wishes to use the Council to impose its own view of the situation on the international community. As has often been the case with our American colleagues lately, today's meeting has become one on Russia, rather than on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

It is said that Russia is trying to exert pressure on the Panel of Experts. We would like to put a stop to such insinuations once and for all. In reality, the work of the Panel — which, for reasons beyond our control, has become increasingly politicized — was held hostage to the view of Washington. The Panel should be guided by the principles of objectivity and impartiality. Regrettably, the first version of the document prepared by it did not meet those standards. In that regard, we and other members of the Committee made some observations that the Panel of Experts perceived appropriately and took into consideration while preparing the report for the Security Council.

The Committee's rules of procedure provide for consultations with Member States on the content of reports. The Council should not see ill intent in the fact that Member States are not indifferent to the section of the report that pertains to the Member States concerned. The experts asked us relevant questions. It is perfectly logical that the answers we provided should be reflected in the report. However, in this case, exactly the opposite has occurred.

Russia has been consistent in its well-reasoned responses to the questions sent by the Panel, including in its responses to the accusations made prolifically against us today by the Permanent Representative of the United States. Our views were not taken into consideration. Unsurprisingly, therefore, we have insisted on having our position reflected in the document. Let me reiterate that this was not an attempt to pressure the Panel of Experts; it was done in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006). I hope that no member of the Council questions the fact that if accusations are made, responses to them should be made with equal transparency. That is precisely why the Russian delegation insisted that its position be taken into consideration and reflected in the report in question.

After difficult negotiations, we believed that a compromise has been reached. I would like to stress that it was a difficult conversation, but at every stage of the negotiations, we managed to reach an understanding with all interested parties, including the American delegation. In her emotional statement, the Permanent Representative of the United States did not inform the Council that a compromise was reached with the agreement of its expert as well. What changed the next day, when it was withdrawn? I hope that the Permanent Representative of the United States understands that it was her own delegation that prevented the submission of the report of the Panel of Experts to the Security Council. That delegation is now preventing the publication of an independent report of the status of the implementation of sanctions on North Korea because it blocked the dissemination of its new version.

I underscore that it was signed by the entire Panel of Experts, including the American expert. Is the delegation of the United States preventing the reflection of views in this document that do not coincide with its own position? In that regard, the following question must be asked. Is it not the delegation of the United States that is currently putting direct pressure on the Panel by demanding that it change its independent decision on the report to be submitted to the Security Council?

The ball is in the United States delegation's court. It presents the issue as an egregious precedent that allegedly violates the independent status of the various Panels of Experts. However, the situation is exactly the opposite. Introducing changes into the report of the Panel of Experts is a perfectly normal practice in the work of the subsidiary bodies of the Council. We wish to stress that no one is undermining the independence of the experts, but let us not forget that they do not work in a vacuum. We need to avoid situations where the legitimate requests of Governments are not taken into account. Let me reiterate a few points.

First, with regard to the oil tanker *Patriot*, the Panel of Experts itself stated that it was not in violation of the sanctions regime. That statement is in the original draft of the report. Secondly, it is untrue that we allegedly removed the section about violations made by a Russian company. That is a lie It remains in the report, unchanged, only it appears in the confidential appendix with some additional details. Thirdly, we requested additional information and evidence from the United States on the issues of quotas and funding for the

representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Russia. We are still awaiting that information. We have been waiting for two months for information on the issue of quotas and four months on that of the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Who is cheating the international community? Who is spreading lies?

With regard to the implementation of the sanctions resolutions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, we cannot fail to draw attention to recent developments on the peninsula. Some time ago, the so-called United Nations Command — let us not be deceived by the name; it is a military structure, led by the United States in the demilitarized area between the two Koreas, using the name of the Organization as a shield — blocked practical steps to implement the inter-Korean initiative to restore rail traffic. However, a connection between the railways of the north and the south is one of the central inter-Korean agreements fixed in the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula. As far as we know, the so-called Command did not allow specialists from either side to inspect the conditions of the tracks. Naturally, comments were made in the press, highlighting the fact that the United Nations was allegedly blocking the implementation of joint inter-Korean projects.

We thank you, Madam President, for your in-depth economic analysis of the issues facing the Russian Far East. In that regard, I would remind you that cooperation on rail transport, including the trilateral Khasan-Rason project, is not covered by the sanctions regimes, including resolution 2397 (2017). Instead of creating roadblocks, the Council should promote inter-Korean dialogue. However, Washington, D.C., is prepared to sacrifice all hopes for inter-Korean dialogue for its own opportunistic interests. What is the United Nations Command — an analog to the Berlin Wall in the twenty-first century? What is being done by the United States can be considered a violation of all Security Council responsibilities under all resolutions of the Security Council seeking a settlement to the North Korean issue through peaceful diplomatic and political solution.

On the other hand, such steps are fully in line with the so-called policy of maximum pressure on Pyongyang. Here, the United States is increasingly aggressive in trying to subjugate the Security Council. We are sometimes left with the impression that Washington, D.C., is beginning to confuse the United Nations Security Council with the United States National Security Council, and unfortunately, today's meeting is no exception.

We also draw attention to the status of the so-called United Nations Command in Korea. The Commander of those forces is also the Commander of the United States armed forces in Korea, as well as the Republic of Korea-United States Combined Forces Command. From the point of view of international law, when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea became full Members of the United Nations in 1991, the preservation of such an institution as the United Nations Command in Korea, which places the United Nations on the belligerent side of the civil war, is legal nonsense. In present conditions, as the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea officially declare their intention to prevent a new inter-Korean conflict and are calling for a declaration to end of the war on the Korean peninsula and the signature of a peace treaty, we must analyse the relevance of the role and troops of the United Nations force, which, as we all know, was established by resolutions 84 (1950) and 85 (1950), which were adopted against a particular historical background.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics boycotted those meetings of the Council, while the Kuomintang authorities occupied the seat of the People's Republic of China. In fact, the Unified Command bears no relation to the United Nations. We should therefore consider its withdrawal, in accordance with the decisions of the thirtieth session of the General Assembly, which, for example, provided for the possible dissolution of the Command by 1976 and its replacement by Korean border troops in the event of further normalization of the situation on the peninsula.

The institutions and mechanisms of the United Nations and the Security Council should be used to support settlement processes, no to hamper them. The common goal of all States involved is to ensure the peaceful settlement of the rising issues in the region, including the nuclear issue, through dialogue and mutually acceptable arrangements. The development of inter-Korean cooperation is in line with that goal, contributes to easing tensions on the peninsula and confirms the commitment undertaken by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the beginning of the year to the normalization of relations with neighbouring countries and the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

We emphasize that such cooperation should not violate the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions. Discussions on future cooperation projects and properly organized research efforts do not violate them. The Security Council and its decisions should not hinder but promote the rapprochement between the North and South. We invite the members of the Council to consider creating special conditions in the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) for temporary exemptions from the sanctions regime for the implementation of inter-Korean cooperation projects. As far as I know, both sides of the Military Demarcation Line share that idea.

The sanctions committee on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a clear example of what the destructive behaviour of some of its members leads to. It seems that the Committee is seen by the United States as a kind of club meant to punish the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for its intransigence in the negotiations. It is very convenient, under the cover of the collective name of the Security Council, to try to exert pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in its bilateral contacts. Washington, D.C., methodically refuses to allow Member States and international organizations to have humanitarian, diplomatic and sports links in Pyongyang, although they have nothing to do with nuclear missile programmes. The requests sent by our American colleagues are in no way justified, since they are intended to be accepted as the absolute truth by other Member States. They make it impossible for the Committee to adopt any consensus decision, even of a technical nature.

In conclusion, we call on all parties to exercise restraint and we stress once again that the quest for a mutually acceptable political-diplomatic course is the only possible way to peacefully resolve the problems on the Korean peninsula and create strong mechanisms for security in North-East Asia, which is in the interest of all countries of the region. However, imposing sanctions and pressure on Pyongyang without taking into account its legitimate interests will make it impossible to achieve that. Once again, I draw attention to the fact that it was in that vein that Russia and China developed the road map for the settlement of the situation on the Korean peninsula that, even with its setbacks, is now being de facto implemented.

The Russian side stands ready to foster close interaction with all interested countries to ensure peace and stability in the region and achieve a comprehensive settlement of the problem on the Korean peninsula on the basis of equal and non-discriminatory negotiations with the participation of all interested States.

The President: I shall now make a further statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

"Deny, distract and lie." We have heard that same song many times before — whether it was aiding the Al-Assad regime with chemical weapons, the attempted murder of the Skripals with a dangerous nerve agent in the United Kingdom, election-meddling in the United States — which, by the way, did not work — or now cheating on sanctions agreements and getting caught. Lying, cheating and rogue behaviour have become the new norm of the Russian culture. The Russian Ambassador said "no one is denying the Panel of Experts". I take that to assume that he will allow the original report of the Panel of Experts to be released.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Cho Tae-yul (Republic of Korea): Let me begin by thanking the United States presidency for convening today's meeting and for giving me this opportunity to take part in the discussion on this important issue. I would also like to thank Under Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing. Let me also echo the words of condolences extended to the victims of Hurricane Florence and those of other natural disasters in China and the Philippines.

It was about 10 months ago that I made my last statement at the Security Council meeting convened to discuss the Democratic People's Republic of Korea-related issue (see S/PV.7996). Since then, dramatic changes have taken place on the Korean peninsula and in North-East Asia. The PyeongChang Winter Olympics in February provided a much-sought window of opportunity to defuse tensions on the Korean peninsula, and the leaders of both Koreas and the United States did not fail to seize it.

As a result, the two inter-Korean summits took place in Panmunjom in April and May, respectively, after a hiatus of 11 years, and the first ever United States-Democratic People's Republic of Korea summit was held in Singapore in June, which opened a new chapter in the relations between the two countries.

Those developments have turned the atmosphere of regional geopolitics from one marked by escalating tensions to one marked by diplomatic efforts.

That turnaround was made possible through a well-measured combination of diplomatic tools. The Security Council and the international community were united in fully implementing the Security Council sanctions regime, sending a clear message to Pyongyang that its pursuit of a nuclear weapons programme will never be accepted. At the same time, the door for dialogue was kept open to bring the Democratic People's Republic of Korea back to the negotiating table. The United States took the lead in our efforts to that end, which was fully supported by the key countries in the region and the members of the Security Council in particular. I would like to also commend the work of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), under the able leadership of our Dutch colleague, and the Panel of Experts in that regard.

Let me emphasize that to achieve the complete denuclearization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, we need to work to make the most of the hard-won momentum for negotiations towards a diplomatic solution. That is exactly what the Republic of Korea has been working, on in close consultation, with the United States during the last several months. President Moon and President Trump have taken the lead themselves and have been directly engaged in the process.

As part of that process, in a matter of hours President Moon Jae-in will visit Pyongyang for his third inter-Korean summit. The summit is expected to add renewed energy to the current diplomatic process. We hope and expect that a significant breakthrough can be made during the summit meeting in Pyongyang, which in turn will help resume the stalled United States-Democratic People's Republic of Korea negotiations.

In the meantime, my Government reaffirms that it will work closely with the international community to ensure the full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions as we seek to implement the 27 April Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula. No doubt, the road ahead will be bumpy. We must pursue our shared goal of the complete denuclearization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with patience, persistence and, above all, a united stance and solidarity. In doing so we must also ensure that sanctions implementation and engagement work in a mutually complementary and reinforcing way, like two wheels of a bicycle spinning in unison. Mutual trust is essential to make progress in the negotiations. Therefore, we also need to make efforts to create an environment conducive to moving the negotiation process forward by gradually and steadily building trust. The ongoing inter-Korean dialogue will help create such an environment, and we look forward to the continued support of the international community for such efforts on our part.

Keeping in mind that common goal, and the need for a united approach to attain it, I must point out that openly debating the United Nations Command's legal status or its action on a specific issue that is not part of the agenda, especially in this official security Council meeting, seems rather inappropriate.

Before I conclude, I would like to express my sincere hope that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will seize the window of opportunity to ensure its security and a bright future by seriously engaging in the negotiations and prove its commitment to denuclearization by taking further meaningful steps.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to begin by joining others in expressing our deep condolences and sympathy for the victims and families of those recently struck by natural disasters in the United States, the Philippines, China and other countries. As a nation that suffers often from natural disasters, Japan feels very strong solidarity with the victims and their families.

I begin my remarks today by thanking you, Madam President, for convening this important meeting, and Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing.

The world witnessed a historic summit meeting between the United States and North Korea. Japan welcomes that undertaking and strongly hopes that momentum will lead to the resolution of the nuclear, missile and abductions issues. We are at a critical juncture. Japan hopes that North Korea will seize this opportunity and take concrete steps to achieve the complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges, as required under the series of resolutions adopted by the Security Council. We believe that only those steps will help North Korea realize a bright future.

While engaging with North Korea we must fully implement the relevant Security Council resolutions,

for North Korea to understand that there is no other way but to change its policy. We must not waver in that determination.

I would also like to underscore that now is not a time to ease or lift any of the sanctions. If North Korea believes it can get sanctions relaxed while keeping its nuclear weapons, it would certainly reduce the incentive for North Korea to achieve complete denuclearization. Japan will spare no effort to ensure the effectiveness of the relevant Security Council resolutions. We must maintain the solidarity of the international community to stop sanctions-evasion activities.

In that regard, Japan shares the United States view that North Korea has breached the 2018 annual cap for refined petroleum products established by resolution 2397 (2017). It is important that all Member States immediately stop supplying refined petroleum products to North Korea. Japan will work closely with the countries concerned, including the United States. As already announced, some countries, including Japan and the United States, are engaging in monitoring and surveillance efforts against illicit maritime activities, including ship-to-ship transfers, with patrol aircraft stationing in Japan.

In order to achieve a comprehensive solution to the issues related to North Korea, we ask the Security Council to maintain its unity in fully implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions. We should neither lose sight of our common cause of achieving the complete denuclearization of North Korea nor allow the very authority of the Council to be challenged by diverting our attention away from cynical attempts to flout the existing sanctions regime. Japan will continue to accelerate efforts to ensure their effective implementation, together with all countries.

Finally, we sincerely hope that the inter-Korean summit meeting to be held this week will lead to concrete actions towards the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): You misunderstood me, Madam President. We stand ready to agree to the publication of a report that objectively reflects Russian concerns. Let me once again draw your attention to the fact that you are the ones preventing its dissemination. There is no other version of the report other than what the Panel of Experts has conveyed to the Security Council, which you have blocked. Therefore, Madam President, when you ask to revert to the original version, you are the ones who are exerting pressure on the Panel of Experts.

You perhaps did not listen to me attentively enough, Madam President, or perhaps your further statement was written beforehand. The lies and denials in our statement to which you have liked to refer to so much recently, as well as other insinuations shamelessly made against our country, were absent from our statement. What we did was to describe the reasons, very clearly and in great detail, as to why we agreed, along with other experts and including American experts, that the report should include the changes that reflect our concerns. That is a simple statement of fact. What you are trying to do is to intentionally ascribe political ill-intent. I also have a request for you, Madam President: please lift the hold on the report of the Panel of Experts and make sure that it sees the light of day.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8354

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8354th meeting
Monday, 17 September 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Cohen	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alahmad
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/824)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/824)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar, Afghan youth representative.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite His Excellency Mr. João Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/824, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: It is a time for important decisions in Afghanistan. These decisions will affect the fundamental fabric of the society and the future of Afghanistan. The Afghan people are scheduled to cast their votes on 20 October to choose their parliamentary representatives for the first time since 2010. Strategic decisions, underpinned by a national consensus, will need to be taken to guide the next steps towards peace.

On 28 November in Geneva, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations will co-chair a ministerial conference on Afghanistan, at which all aspects of civilian efforts in the country will be placed on the table for review and mutual commitment.

Just over a month from now, the Afghan people are scheduled to go to the polls. I have met many Afghans across the country who have impressed upon me their desire to exercise their right to elect their representatives. Many will face considerable risks to do that. Operationally and technically, the preparations are on track, yet I remain very concerned that political challenges could jeopardize the tight timelines and derail the elections unless all political leaders are engaged constructively and peacefully to ensure that elections are held on time. Security is also a serious concern.

From a technical point of view alone, elections are possible. The candidate lists were finalized in time to enable the printing of ballot papers to meet the deadline. The recruitment of the election officials is on track. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced that more than 9 million people had registered to vote. Many opposition parties remain sceptical about that number, citing both the security concerns that would have prevented many people from registering and alleging fraud. Several safeguards for the verification of voter lists and fraud prevention measures are being put in place. Despite those measures, scepticism remains. Over the past few days, supporters of a coalition of political parties have started to block several provincial election commission offices, demanding that additional safeguards be put in place. Such actions hinder the work of the IEC and jeopardize the holding of the elections on time. Political concerns must be addressed through institutional mechanisms, not through blockades.

Regardless of the reforms that are being implemented, the parliamentary elections will undoubtedly be a major test for Afghanistan's young democratic institutions. Almost one-third of Afghanistan's more than 7,000 polling centres will not open due to insecurity. That raises concerns about inclusivity. The main question is therefore not whether the elections will be imperfect but how Afghanistan's electoral institutions will manage such limitations.

In my communications with the political actors in Afghanistan, I have consistently stressed three key points. First, continued international support should not be taken for granted. That is also true for the continuation of the constitutional order. Secondly, there must be an awareness that the parliamentary elections have implications beyond selecting parliamentarians,

including for the presidential election in April 2019. We are aware of the real possibility of fraud taking place, as well as allegations of fraud, which may have the tactical purpose of discrediting the already difficult elections. The Afghan institutions must combat both. Thirdly, I urge all political actors and institutions to perform their duties, to act responsibly and to think of the Afghan people, bearing in mind the country's bitter past.

At this critical juncture, the Independent Election Commission, as the lead institution on elections, will be expected to discharge its function with the highest degree of integrity, with professionalism and with full accountability to the Afghan people. The Afghan institutions and political leaders have a shared responsibility for the success of the elections. I also urge the IEC to redouble its efforts to reach out to the public in order to raise awareness of that important process. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) will do everything possible within its mandate and with the resources available to support a successful electoral process.

President Ghani's offer to the Taliban in February this year to engage in talks without preconditions created unprecedented political space for peace, culminating in a temporary ceasefire in June. It showed that reconciliation was possible. That newfound momentum was further supported by numerous citizen mobilizations, demonstrating the desire for a peaceful future. The second ceasefire, proposed by the Government in August, was unfortunately not reciprocated by the Taliban. Peace processes rarely move along straight lines. Setbacks were to be expected. However, I believe that all actors recognized the craving of the Afghan people for peace and the undeniable need for a peace process. Whatever setbacks may lie ahead, we are in a better position now than at any time in the past 17 years to commence a process leading to talks for a negotiated end to the conflict.

The most difficult phases lie ahead. They will require resilience and persistence on the part of all sides. The efforts of the Afghan Government, which we hope will be reciprocated by the Taliban, need to be reinforced by the coordinated approach of the regional and other key countries to move forward. I urge all sides to agree on concrete measures to build confidence towards more structured talks. Such key confidence-building steps could include prisoner releases and their treatment, as well as measures at the technical level in fields such as agriculture, education and health in contested areas. They could lead to the cessation of violence, or at least a significant reduction. All sides must realize that there is no military solution to the conflict. I also wish to underline the importance of ensuring the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for the promotion, establishment and maintenance of peace and security.

The recent attack on the provincial capital of Ghazni and the frequent suicide attacks in Kabul and elsewhere remind us of the terrible toll on civilian lives and livelihoods. In the first six months of this year, UNAMA recorded the highest number of civilian deaths since the Mission started to track civilian casualties. In recent weeks, we have also seen a continuation of the disturbing pattern of attacks targeting the Shia Muslim community. Each death is an individual tragedy, but it is also a tragedy for the country. Reconciliation becomes harder with each life lost.

Insecurity is also taking its toll on journalists and aid workers. This year alone, 13 journalists have lost their lives and many more have been wounded. That is the highest number of deaths in any country. I urge the Government to take additional measures to enhance their protection. Also this year, 23 aid workers have lost their lives, 37 have been injured and 74 have been abducted, making Afghanistan the second most dangerous country in which the profession conducts its work, while 2.2 million people are suffering from the country's worst drought in years.

Two months from now, the Afghan Government and its international partners will gather in Geneva at the ministerial level in order to discuss all aspects of civilian efforts in Afghanistan. That is the biennial opportunity, at the ministerial level, to follow up on the mutual commitment made in Bonn in 2011. The Geneva ministerial conference will be held at the mid-point of the transformation decade, which ends in 2024. Together with the long-term international commitments in the security field, the Geneva ministerial conference will signal sustained political commitment to Afghanistan provided that the Afghan side lives up to its commitment to reforms and development. The Afghan Government committed to the delivery of six benchmarks, namely, first, the holding of parliamentary elections; secondly, advancing its anti-corruption efforts; thirdly, reforming the security sector; fourthly, meeting the International Monetary Fund benchmarks; fifthly, promoting private sector development; and, sixthly, the development of national priority programmes. The Geneva conference

will also provide an opportunity for the international community to further clarify its expectations regarding the peace process and the ways in which it can support such a process.

We recently lost an icon of the international community. In 2001, former Secretary-General Kofi Annan began his Nobel Peace Prize speech with a few simple words. He said: "Today, in Afghanistan, a girl will be born." That girl is now almost a woman who will soon be old enough to vote, to attend university and to pursue the vocation of her dreams. Will she be able to? I am sure that that girl will be watching closely the developments of the next few months.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Bakhtiar.

Mr. Bakhtiar: It is a great honour to speak in the Security Council in my capacity as the Afghan Youth Representative to the United Nations at a time when many Afghans feel forgotten by the international community and overwhelmed by a merciless war. The Council is communicating an important message to our people by giving a young Afghan this platform as well as expressing support for the active participation of youth in decision-making, in line with resolution 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018).

I realize that this is an opportunity for me, as someone living and working in that country as a youth activist, to draw attention to the more complex and nuanced reality of Afghanistan. Afghanistan has suffered so much and for so long. It is our reality. I am pleased to say that it is also a reality that our resilience, progress and aspirations keep us focused on working for a better tomorrow.

We are not a failed nation; we are a resilient nation that has been tested and challenged in a way very few other nations have ever been. We ourselves are not only the victims of global terrorism; we are also fighting it on behalf of all others. Afghans are at the front lines of the battle against our common enemy.

The young generation of Afghanistan shares common values and interests with our global partners and friends that allow us to strengthen and deepen our partnership with our friends in the region and with our allies throughout the world.

Two thirds of Afghanistan's population is under the age of 25. These young people barely remember the time of the Taliban, let alone previous regimes. They belong to a new Afghanistan. They have ambitions similar to those of their fellow youth in other parts of the world. The youth of Afghanistan are different in their way of thinking, in their approach and in the way they define and see our relationship with the world in the next 10 to 20 years. They are true partners to the rest of the world; they do not just expect permanent dependency on it but are trying hard to achieve interdependency, trust and cooperation.

Our ambition is to make our country a hub for regional connectivity and a land of opportunities. We want the world to explore our culture and music and learn our history. We were a nation that embraced diversity as an asset and respected our religious beliefs. Our generation is committed to reviving our historical values once again.

The young generation of Afghanistan has been the key driver of many of the successes of the past 17 years. The media is one shining example. In 2001, independent media were virtually non-existent. Today Afghan journalists are doing heroic work under incredibly difficult circumstances. Afghan media play an increasingly significant role in giving a voice to voiceless Afghans and in holding power to account. We have lost 53 journalists in a little less than four years. Before coming to New York, I lost two of my colleagues and friends from TOLOnews TV, Samim Faramarz and Ramiz Ahmadi, in twin bombings as they were reporting live from a blast site. Their colleagues were simultaneously mourning, reporting and looking after their families. That is our reality of both pain and strength.

We are certain that Afghanistan will never go back to the past, because there are thousands of like-minded youth who are hopeful and are working fearlessly to remake their country with their own hands, and they have the hope that the international community will not abandon them halfway.

Terrorism has affected all Afghans. More than anyone else we want peace in our country. We are holding the fort with our resilience and hope. We expect the Council to focus on the real causes of terrorism and force all regional players to play a constructive role in Afghanistan.

A few days ago, Kabul lost 17-year-old Rahila, who was killed by a suicide bomber along with 47 other students in an educational centre. She had written in her diary about her dreams and future goals:

> "I can be the Rahila that society desperately needs in its pursuit of prosperity and progress. This society will overcome its current crisis through solutions drawn from the knowledge and education of its youth".

A few days after Rahila was killed just for going to school, her brother established a library under her name in Kabul to complete his sister's dream of educating girls in Afghanistan. That is a clear demonstration of Afghan resolve.

In another attempt at peace, earlier this year a caravan from the southern province of Helmand started walking — barefoot — to Kabul, demanding peace. One of the members of the Helmand Peace March is 22-year-old Zaheer Ahmad Zindani, who was blinded five years ago by a roadside bomb. In August 2018, I met with the caravan in Kabul, and they asked me to convey this message:

> "Afghans are now going through the deadliest days, weeks, years and decades. We have lost our finest ones to this bloody war. But we want peace, and peace in Afghanistan cannot come without the support and the will of the international community, in particular the United Nations. We therefore call on all countries involved with the issue of Afghanistan not to spend resources and human capital on the excesses of war but on bringing long-lasting peace to Afghanistan".

The caravan is still walking and just reached Mazar-e-Sharif. They have said that they will not stop walking until peace has been achieved. That is the resolve and resilience of our generation.

Our generation also believes in democracy. We expect our elections to happen next month. We fear that because of various challenges the elections will trigger nationwide unrest. The Council has a key role in keeping our Government focused on national priorities, including holding acceptable elections, fighting corruption and supporting our security forces in their tough fight.

Let me say by way of conclusion that I drafted my speech on 9/11, but in 2018. This brought to mind the terrorists' most heinous attack on the World Trade Center Twin Towers. This should be a reminder of the fact that terrorism is a global phenomenon that threatens us all. We all have the responsibility to ensure that such an atrocity never happens again. This can be ensured when we all shoulder our share of responsibility and fight against terrorism together.

On behalf of all Afghans, I am grateful for everyone's sacrifices and contributions in rebuilding Afghanistan.

The President: I thank Mr. Bhaktiar for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me begin by conveying our best wishes for a successful Council presidency in September and our gratitude to the United States for having convened today's debate on Afghanistan. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing. We are particularly pleased by the presence of Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar, Afghanistan's first-ever United Nations Youth Representative. We were pleased to see him address the Council today and reflect the voice of our youth on the overall situation in the country. His merit-based selection as our United Nations Youth Representative is a manifestation of how far our younger generation has come in becoming proactive agents of change in society.

Today's meeting of the Security Council takes place at a crucial moment, as we draw near to the parliamentary elections scheduled for next month and the international Geneva Conference on Afghanistan in November, to be followed by the anticipated presidential elections, in April 2019. If all goes well, by the middle of next year we should have completed our political transition, with a new Parliament and a new Government.

Meanwhile, our security forces are leading the national struggle against terrorist and extremist groups, which have increased their brutality against our people as part of a renewed attempt to take even more innocent lives, including those of journalists and aid workers, and subvert our progress.

As guardians of our territorial integrity, our national security forces continue to grow in size, strength and professionalism. Moreover, in addition to the substantial increase of our special forces, we are also working to triple the size of our air force by 2020. This, together with our ongoing reform, will have a

profound impact in terms of enhancing our fight against international terrorism.

In the broader context, and despite the difficult security environment, we remain on track to solidify gains in different areas, including governance and development. This is due primarily to the strength and resilience of our people in defying complex challenges, as they have so courageously done throughout the course of our nation's history; and secondly, to the continued support of our many friends and allies in the international community.

The core objective of our enduring partnership with the international community is based on achieving a sustainable peace that is seen as just and comprehensive. As we take stock of the status of peace efforts through new outreach to the Taliban, we need to draw the right lessons from the history of engagement with that group. This is essential to ensure that we are indeed on the right track as we move forward.

Following our sustained efforts, this year at the Kabul process conference in February we launched a reinvigorated and more flexible peace plan that presented unprecedented incentives that were unanticipated even by the Taliban. It included unconditional talks and measures for their return to and reintegration into society. Lately, through increased diplomatic engagement with various partners, we have strengthened regional and international consensus in support of peace efforts. The successive civil mobilizations and gatherings of Islamic scholars in Kabul, Jakarta and Jeddah helped to enable and welcome the first-ever temporary ceasefire with the Taliban in June. Nevertheless, despite that brief lull in fighting, the Taliban rejected the second ceasefire proposed by us and welcomed by the Council. Making real progress in peace efforts will not be possible unless the consistent pattern of manipulating, misusing opportunities and using deception for strategic gains comes to an end.

Afghanistan stands fully committed to engaging in a genuine peace process with tangible results for our people. However, the guiding principle in moving forward dictates that the fundamental factors that have prevented peace efforts from gaining traction must first be adequately detected and then addressed. All along, we have underscored the importance of regional support for our peace efforts, with a specific role for Pakistan. Advancing the peace process is a key element of the recently signed Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. We welcome last Saturday's visit of Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to Kabul, where he expressed his Government's readiness to support peace and stability in Afghanistan. The key determinant in validating that commitment will be the full and effective implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity.

For nearly a quarter of a century, Afghanistan has been the site of what I term the "geographical genocide" of certain circles within our region. The expectation is that my country should either become their "trusted" agent or be weakened, bled and represented as the horrific face of terror around the world, devoid of its independence, advancement, rich culture and history. The erratic positions of the Taliban in the peace talks, their leaderless profile, factional structure and brutal attacks are used to pursue this policy. Such genocide, with casualties of more than 10,000 a year and traumatizing millions — as we have heard in the presentation by our youth representative — has had a negative impact on almost everything else in our country, including governance, economy, electoral process, anti-corruption, counter-narcotics and so on. The important thing is that we either address the root causes or continue to talk about their consequences.

Afghanistan has clearly asserted that regional and international support is vital to the success of the Afghan-led peace process. We welcome all coordinated efforts leading to direct talks that can generate concrete results, rather than a repeat of the past. We are keenly following the interactions of some of our partners with the Taliban, which are being coordinated with the Afghan Government.

Let me take this opportunity to express a word of thanks to all partners, inside and outside our region, who are supporting our peace process. Such efforts, rendered in a manner that reinforces our ownership and leadership of the process, remain essential.

Other key issues are the upcoming elections, which will determine our future stability. Efforts are under way to ensure that the elections are free, fair, inclusive and transparent, in accordance with the will of our people. The successful electoral outcome will have a profound impact on the future positive trajectory of Afghanistan. Our people expect us to deliver on this national process by addressing legitimate concerns and preventing fraud and insecurity from jeopardizing the process.

We welcome the Security Council's new emphasis on the imperative of transparent elections, as emphasized in its presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/15) and press statements issued in July and August. This is a welcome development, acknowledged by the people and Government of Afghanistan. Furthermore, our national unity and political stability provide the best guarantee for the long-term stability of our country. In this light, through a broad national dialogue, we need to work on all outstanding issues related to upcoming elections and win the trust of most stakeholders. We know full well that successful elections and achieving other important national objectives can best be realized in a spirit of unity and understanding.

The Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan in November will mark a new chapter in relations with our international partners. Geneva will be a chance for us to brief the international community on progress made against the benchmarks of the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. More broadly, it will explore the way forward with respect to peace efforts and the regional economic cooperation agenda, which is one of the main achievements of the National Unity Government.

The endorsement of a new mutual accountability framework will refine the nature of our cooperation to make it more impactful for our people, through the improvement of development aid from international donors and effective project completion in the context of our national development strategy. The preparatory meeting for the Ministerial Conference — co-chaired by Foreign Minister Rabbani, Finance Minister Qayumi and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto — will be held here in New York on Sunday. We look forward to seeing everyone there.

We have always placed special emphasis on achieving an environment in our region, where various neighbours work in tandem, in a spirit of mutual trust and confidence for win-win cooperation. We have done so believing that only such an approach will lead to success in overcoming common transnational threats and challenges. We continue to widen our network of bilateral arrangements with regional countries, including Central Asian States. In the same spirit, we recognize the enormous economic and other potentials that are yet to be fully utilized.

That is precisely the reason behind various Afghan-led initiatives, such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA). New memberships in the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process signal growing interest among the broader region. We hope the review and renewal of the confidence-building measures will enable each to make progress at a more equal and similar pace. Furthermore, the RECCA process has achieved phenomenal success in advancing regional connectivity and infrastructure development, turning our country into a platform of cordiality for all.

In conclusion, let us bear in mind that we, collectively, stand at a crossroads in our strategic journey for peace and stability in Afghanistan and, more broadly, for global security. In that regard, the start of our partnership with the international community in 2001 generated a contract aimed at securing a stable future for our current and future generations. Together, we have come a long way, reaching the last stage of the transformation decade for self-reliance. Let us complete this vital journey with greater resolve and commitment.

The President: I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to start by thanking Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and Ambassador Saikal for his statement.

We also warmly welcome Ramiz Bakhtiar as the first youth representative for Afghanistan, and thank the United States presidency for inviting him. Ramiz was elected in June as part of a joint initiative by Afghanistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. We are very pleased to see Ramiz here today to give Afghan youth a voice and have it be heard on a global stage. It is important that the Council fully take the youth perspective into account, as we agreed in resolution 2419 (2018), on youth, peace and security. Let the briefing of Ramiz be the start of a new normal in which we do not only talk about the future generation, but also let the future generation participate in the talking.

Allow me to focus on three issues today: the upcoming elections, Afghanistan's long-term reform agenda and the importance of youth.

The importance of the Afghan parliamentary elections on 20 October and presidential elections on 20 April next year cannot be overstated. It is absolutely critical that the elections be free, transparent and inclusive, and that they include the active involvement

of youth and women, both as voters and as candidates. Afghanistan and the Independent Election Commission will have to do their utmost to ensure that the elections take place in an orderly and credible way. Political actors from across the political spectrum have to remain engaged with the political process in a constructive and peaceful manner, while they uphold the highest democratic standards. Threats of disengagement or boycotts are not in the interest of the Afghan people.

For successful elections, it is also indispensable to have a secure environment. We are deeply concerned by the recent spike in violence, following the score of tragic terrorist attacks and the unjustifiable offensives of the Taliban. The displayed contempt for the lives of innocent civilians is unacceptable, and we condemn it in the strongest terms. We urge the Taliban to reciprocate the offer of the Afghan Government to engage in direct peace negotiations. There is no alternative to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

My second point concerns Afghanistan's long-term reform agenda. If Afghanistan is to enjoy durable peace and prosperity, reliable and resilient public institutions need to be in place. Afghanistan's transformation decade will soon reach its halfway mark, and the upcoming Geneva Ministerial Conference will provide the opportunity to assess progress and to align priorities for the coming period.

To achieve the agreed objectives, the Afghan Government will need to step up its efforts to end corruption, strengthen governance and the rule of law, and guarantee respect for human rights, with an important support role for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), of course. Such reforms will provide a new generation with the opportunity to contribute to a more just, stable and unified Afghanistan. We look forward to the participation of all interested countries in the Geneva Conference, expressing their full solidarity and support for Afghanistan.

Allow me to zoom in on the importance of involving youth in the discussions that fundamentally shape their future. Ramiz and so many of his Afghan peers are determined to contribute to the future of Afghanistan. That sends a very hopeful and powerful message. In a country where more than 63 per cent of the population is under 25, the ambition and commitment of young people represent one of Afghanistan's greatest opportunities. Their active involvement in addressing the challenges that Afghanistan faces is key.

In conclusion, the voice of Afghanistan's people, including its youth, is clear — we need a workable peace deal. That will require political courage. It will require perseverance. On the Council's side, it will require continued unity in its support. Galvanizing the momentum of the Afghan-owned peace process is our collective responsibility. The briefings by the Special Representative and Ramiz gave us important food for thought in that regard, including by reminding us of the significance of investing in Afghanistan's youth on the road to peace and stability.

Finally, I want to thank the Special Representative and his team for their tremendous efforts in assisting Afghanistan, often in difficult circumstances. They deserve our full support.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the progress we have seen in the electoral process in Afghanistan. We are also hopeful about the fact that 8.9 million Afghans, including more than 3 million women, will be able to exercise their democratic right to vote in the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections on 20 October.

We highlight the resolve of Afghan women and men to participate in their electoral process with a participative and inclusive spirit, while expressing their desire to bolster the conditions necessary in order to ensure credible elections in the framework of their own fully sovereign, democratic practices without any external intervention, and with the full participation of women and minority groups, including all ethnic, religious and linguistic groups, both as voters and as candidates.

We also express our full support and recognition for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which, in close coordination with the Government of Afghanistan, has been supporting the organization of the elections through technical assistance and other forms of collaboration. We hope that the electoral process will be carried out in a secure and stable environment. The participation of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, which have shown leadership in the maintenance of security in Afghanistan, is critical in that regard.

In that order of priorities, we take note of the fact that violence diminished during the Eid al-Fitr ceasefire

period. We regret that during the week of that holiday, UNAMA nonetheless recorded 285 incidents and that, in the weeks following the ceasefire, armed clashes with the Taliban increased once again.

We hope that the effects of the conflict will not exacerbate the situation of civil society, which in the first semester of 2018 suffered 1,692 deaths. The attacks on civilian infrastructure, schools, hospitals and media and communications offices highlight the violence to which Afghan society is subject. Bolivia calls on all parties to fulfil their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law in order to prevent attacks on the civilian population and civilian infrastructure.

On the other hand, serious restrictions on obtaining redress in cases of sexual and gender-based violence, along with the high prevailing degree of impunity, highlight the need to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights. We believe that the Afghan authorities should take all the measures needed to assist the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission to play its fundamental role as an effective and independent institution.

Finally, and as we have noted previously, we condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks that took place on 5 September in Kabul, which were claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and on 11 September in Nangarhar, both of which resulted in the death of at least 61 people and an as-yet undetermined number of wounded. Bolivia reiterates that any act of terrorism is criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of its motivation, andwherever, whenever and by whomever it is committed. The international community as a whole must join forces to cooperate with Afghanistan in combating this evil within the framework of respect for its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and, through him, the entire team in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for the work they do. I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for reminding us of the Kofi Annan story about the young girl. It is good to be reminded of the human dimension. It is therefore doubly pleasurable to be able to welcome Mr. Bakhtiar and hear his perspective, as well as that of the Afghan ambassador.

Like other speakers, I would like to begin by condemning the recent terrorist attacks, including those in Nangarhar, and offering our condolences to all the families of those killed and wounded. We need to continue all our efforts to support the Afghan forces as they seek to combat those who would destroy communities and the lives of innocent, ordinary Afghan civilians.

Today's debate is an important one. It is the last of the quarterly debates before the parliamentary elections on 20 October. I would like to focus on those elections in my statement today. Mr. Yamamoto highlighted the challenges of organizing these elections on time. We are also very grateful for the work of his team in supporting the Afghan authorities. All political leaders in Afghanistan should work to improve the process, not to undermine it. We call on them to cooperate to this end. At the moment, a number of critical issues on the elections remain unresolved.

First, with respect to the voter registration lists, the election staff in Kabul has put a lot of effort into compiling and verifying the lists of those who have registered to vote. These lists should be published at the local level as early as possible, with the proper complaints mechanism in place to give the Afghan people time to check their details and register any complaints.

Secondly, with regard to communications, an effective communications strategy from the election-management bodies explaining the progress that has been made and what further efforts are under way is important for the confidence of the Afghan electorate.

Thirdly, with respect to the security of voters, elections officials and election materials, my Government calls on all actors to respect the safety and lives of civilians who take part in the elections, and calls on those actors to refrain from violent disruption.

We commend the bravery of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces for their work, and we know that it is a difficult time for them. We call on those illegally blockading provincial offices of the Independent Election Commission to disperse peacefully. Elections are only five weeks away, and it is critical that preparations be allowed to go ahead.

Turning to wider matters, I had the honour to be British Ambassador to Afghanistan in 2015 and 2016,

so I would like to tell Mr. Bakhtiar and Ambassador Saikal that I remain an optimist about their beautiful but troubled country. Given what Afghanistan has suffered, given her state of development — she is one of the poorest countries in the world — and given that the main threat to Afghan security comes from insurgents who are supported from outside Afghanistan, I think we are all prepared for this to take a long time. The international community has been prepared for that and has prepared longer-term strategies.

The Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which a number of speakers have mentioned, will, we believe, be an important moment for the Government of Afghanistan to reflect on progress made so far, but also to recommit to the necessary reforms, which are required to drive the sustainable and inclusive growth the Afghan people deserve over the remainder of the transformation decade. My Government is fully committed to the Conference and to playing its part in preparations that are now under way.

That said, it is important that, in all the security, economic, human rights and development challenges that the Afghan people face, all sectors of Afghan society and citizenry come together to do the following things: to strengthen good governance, to uphold the rule of law and human rights, including the right to health, the education of women and girls, and above all, to be tolerant. I arrived in Kabul a week after the very sad killing of Farkhunda Malikzada, and I have never forgotten the intolerance and brutality that led to that sad outcome. Afghan communities need to invest in the future. They need to tackle corruption at all levels, engage in the economic liberalization necessary to attract foreign direct investment, and make tangible progress with their regional partners on regional cooperation.

We heard from the Afghan ambassador and from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General about the peace process with Pakistan. We wish that process well. It goes without saying that peace is the only viable way forward for Afghanistan. We very much support the National Unity Government in its efforts in this regard. We hope that all other States will do their utmost to support the Government. The temporary ceasefire brought about by President Ghani was a very important moment, and it is regrettable that the Taliban have not responded to his subsequent offers. The Taliban need to demonstrate that their really do have the heart of Afghanistan as their main concern and that their concern is for the people of Afghanistan. They need to respond positively to the important offers made by President Ghani in February.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his analysis of the processes taking place in Afghanistan. We listened closely to the statements delivered by the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, and by Mr. Bakhtiar. We concur with many of the assessments contained in the relevant quarterly report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/824). For our part, we wish to note the following.

We are profoundly alarmed at the security situation in Afghanistan. The Taliban movement controls nearly half of the country, periodically seizing new districts, including in the north. We note that its fighters have a capacity to stage large-scale, coordinated and well-prepared operations. A stark example of this fact are the days-long attacks against the strategically important Ghazni province, the large-scale attacks against Ghor, Farah and Sari Pul, and the difficult situations that have unfolded in Paktia, Helmand, Faryab, Samangan, Herat and Kunduz. Against that backdrop, we are especially troubled by the state of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, which incur unprecedented losses on a daily basis.

Our attention remains closely focused on the surge of terrorist activity by the Afghan wing of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), whose ranks are growing largely due to foreign fighters with battlefield experience from Syria and Iraq. According to our sources, the number of ISIL adherents may be as high as 10,000. The danger is further compounded by their growing ideological, propagandistic and recruitment activity, which makes skillful use of information and communication technology. Despite reports about fighters being routed and their partial surrender to Government forces in Jawzjan in August, they still retain footholds in provinces of the north and north-east, from where they seek to gain traction in the country. We see a threat both to our borders and to those of our Central Asian neighbhours. The Taliban also sporadically joins the fight against ISIL, largely in the north and east of Afghanistan, which points to the fact that the ISIL threat is recognized both by the authorities in Kabul and by the Taliban. We must stress

that the fight against the terrorists in Afghanistan would be far more effective if regional and international efforts were combined.

With respect to Afghanistan and other conflicts, what remains relevant is our initiative to establish a wide-ranging counter-terrorist coalition. It is necessary to shed light on the situation regarding the unmarked helicopter flights in northern Afghanistan, which provide both weaponry and munitions to ISIL adherents. We are surprised by the fact that there has been no response to those events, including from the command of the NATO contingent stationed there. We believe that attempts to sweep this issue under the rug are not acceptable. We are troubled by reports about attempts by the Afghan wing of ISIL to reach agreement with the Taliban movement and other organizations to coordinate operations. Moreover, contacts are being strengthened between ISIL and representatives of the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement. In the light of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, we deem it necessary to proactively leverage the Security Council's counter-terrorism sanctions mechanisms. We advocate the placement of additional barriers to pre-empt terrorist activity in that country. It is important to specifically emphasize the sanctioning of individuals and entities who are complicit in ISIL operations.

We are troubled at the unbridled growth in narcotics production. Narcotics provide significant financial support for terrorists in Afghanistan. In that connection, we are confounded at the fact that the issue of Afghan narcotics is completely disregarded in the final observations of the report. We believe that it is important for this to be prioritized. It is the thrust of our practical measures, including through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The Russian Federation spares no effort in supporting the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in that regard, including providing regular assistance to the UNODC-led Paris Pact Initiative, which seeks to comprehensively prevent Afghan opium production, the regional UNODC programme for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries and the alternative development programme in Badakhshan province. We are pleased at the implementation of our initiative to train narcotics police officers from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asian countries, as well as the joint Domodedovo project with Japan to form a canine unit for Afghanistan, which we trust will serve as a key tool in the fight against narcotics in the country.

We note with regret that the 17-year, large-scale military presence of NATO and United States troops has not served to stabilize the military and political situation in the country. What is clear is that the approach of using force to exert pressure has not brought about the desired results; it only escalates the conflict. We believe that there is no military solution to the crisis in Afghanistan. The only way to resolve the crisis is through pan-Afghan consensus achieved through political and diplomatic means. That is especially urgent at the current juncture on the eve of elections, which should serve as a step towards the unification of the country. We support the policy of Kabul and the country's social and political forces to achieve that end. We believe that negotiations need to be conducted under the leadership of the Afghan people themselves. We reaffirm our willingness to lend our fullest support.

We welcome international and regional efforts to assist Afghanistan in establishing a peace process. However, it is paramount that there be no competition in that regard: it is not about building fiefdoms. We must instead build an optimal platform for international support for establishing a peace process in Afghanistan by engaging the stakeholders. Such a vision is advanced by the Moscow format of consultations with Afghanistan, a meeting of which we plan to hold with the participation of representatives of the Taliban, following the formulation of a consolidated position on the matter in Kabul. We trust that the United States will be involved. The invitation still stands.

We note the growing understanding worldwide of the importance of the regional context to any Afghan settlement. We note in particular the renewed SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. We see sound potential for scaling up counter-narcotics engagement between Afghanistan and the CSTO.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to play an important role in coordinating international assistance to Afghanistan. We commend the selfless and courageous efforts UNAMA personnel.

Russia and Afghanistan are linked together by historical, friendly, open relations based on trust. We genuinely hope to see swift stabilization in the country, for it to get back on track to sustainable development. On

that basis, we stand ready to engage with Afghanistan and with regional and international partners.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Our delegation wishes to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for the comprehensive and detailed report (S/2018/824) on developments in the situation in Afghanistan and for the valuable information provided in his briefing here today. We also thank Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar, Afghan youth representative, and welcome his participation in this important debate and his very constructive statement on the situation in Afghanistan.

First of all, we would like to convey our deepest condolences to the people and the Government of Afghanistan following the most recent outrageous terrorist attacks — yet again, let us recognize them as acts of cowardice — in Kabul and Nangarhar on 5 and 11 September, respectively.

We are highly dismayed and concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan. The country has once again been shaken by a wave of bloody terrorist attacks that have claimed the lives of approximately 1,692 Afghan civilians, in the short period of only six months, as reflected in the report under discussion, from January to June. The increase in suicide and air attacks — of 38 per cent and 46 per cent, respectively — as compared to the same period in 2017 is alarming. Indeed, the number of fatalities reported this year by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has exceeded 5,000. It is unacceptable and inconceivable to remain indifferent to such barbaric acts, especially since they have greatest impact on the most vulnerable sector of the population.

A convergence of factors clearly hinders the realization of the peace and security the Afghan people seek. However, as we have discussed at length in this Chamber, a solution to Afghanistan's conflicts can be found only through effective, constructive and direct political negotiations among the relevant parties, as well as the holding of transparent and inclusive elections whereby Afghans determine the political and socioeconomic system most fitting to their customs and culture and favourable to the interests and well-being of the Afghan people. Allow me to make some observations regarding some factors contributing to the instability and insecurity in Afghanistan.

First, on the political front — and in no way do I wish to minimize the progress and achievements of the Afghan Government, the international community and other regional and international actors with respect to peace agreements and other accords — we believe that the status quo in Afghanistan has not been improved to date because some of the parties involved in the conflict and their respective partners have put their interests before those of the Afghan people. All negotiations must be focused solely and exclusively on seeking solutions to the real problems that Afghanistan is facing related to security, stability, the prosperity of the Afghan people and the promotion of national reconciliation as a fundamental way of resolving the problems of the Afghan people.

We must bear in mind that there will always be a party that does not believe its interests and the interests of the Afghan people are being met. Therefore, it is no coincidence that, as the elections on 20 October approach, we are seeing an increase in attacks and efforts not only to boycott the elections, but also to paralyse a democratic political process through the political mobilization of opposition groups, occupation and closure of the facilities of the Independent Electoral Commission in some provinces, among other things. As they are not practices that are worthy of anyone wishing to govern the country democratically, we urge all parties to participate in a meaningful way in the political process aimed at bringing about lasting peace and stability for the people of Afghanistan.

The Government of Equatorial Guinea commends the Afghan Government for the positive progress made towards holding the elections despite the difficulties that are arising. We encourage the Government not to waver in its diligent efforts to conduct successful elections, which we believe will represent a positive change for the Afghan people. We also welcome President Ghani's new call for a ceasefire. We believe that demonstrates his real commitment to achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan. We call on all armed groups, in particular the Taliban, to respond positively to the appeals of President Ghani and the Government to refrain from committing violent actions and to come to the negotiating table.

Secondly, attacks against public facilities, as have been noted in the most recent attacks, are particularly alarming. For our delegation, the chilling numbers of civilians killed and wounded so far in 2018 remain cause for dismay. Amid those horrifying statistics, the proportion of children and women killed and wounded and the ongoing extreme damage inflicted on civilians

by constant suicide bombings and other improvised explosive device attacks is extremely worrying. We therefore again urge all parties to the conflict to take every possible measure to protect civilians, especially women and children, in accordance with international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights standards.

Another factor that we believe is increasing instability and insecurity among the Afghan people, and which also concerns us, is the significant increase in opium production. We are aware of the close relationship between the cultivation and trafficking of opium and terrorism. In that context, we commend the counter-narcotics operations carried out by the Government, with the support of the international community and in close cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which resulted in a high number of narcotics seizures, the arrest of drug traffickers and the closure of heroin laboratories, among other successes.

Thirdly, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to have a debate on the situation in Afghanistan without addressing the issue of humanitarian assistance. Based on information from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, two thirds of Afghanistan is suffering from an unusually severe drought, which has caused more than 100,000 people to leave their homes in search of water. That situation, together with the prevalence of diseases such as polio and others, constitutes a combination of serious consequences, and we must urgently find the most effective way to provide humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea acknowledges and is grateful for the crucial role played by the UNAMA and all United Nations agencies, as well as the role that countries of the region are playing in support of the Afghan people, to foster peace and reconciliation, monitor and promote human rights and help enhance the credibility, integrity, inclusiveness and sustainability of the electoral process, as well as to ensure better coordination of the assistance of the international community in Afghanistan.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. We are also grateful for the briefings by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto and Ramiz Bakhtiar, representative of Afghan youth. We also thank Ambassador Saikal for his statement. We would also like to welcome the appointment of Ms. Ingrid Hayden as Deputy Special Representative for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Peru notes with concern the complex security situation in Afghanistan. We vigorously condemn the continued terrorist attacks against the population and civilian infrastructure. We express our solidarity with the victims and their families of the most recent attacks carried out by Da'esh in Kabul and Nangarhar.

We stress the need to address terrorism in a comprehensive manner, including tackling its root causes. Terrorists must be held accountable for their crimes. Their links with transnational organized crime, in particular illicit drug trafficking, must be identified and combated. We consider it of the utmost importance that the political class remain united, in view of the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections, in order to guarantee the stability and governability of the country and, based on that, to overcome the serious challenges that the country faces.

We note with concern the threats of electoral boycott by some political sectors, and we agree with the Secretary-General on the need to participate responsibly and constructively in the ongoing process. We hope that all political forces, and citizens in general, will be able to participate massively in the elections, in safe conditions and in the spirit of democratic unity.

We would like to highlight the Government's commitment to women's empowerment, and the support provided by UNAMA in that area. We believe it is particularly important to promote greater participation by women and young people, such as Ramiz Bakhtiar, in the political life of the country, in accordance with resolution 2419 (2018), in order to build a shared vision for the future and to combat violent extremism.

We would also like to highlight President Ghani's initiative to promote direct negotiations with the Taliban. However, it is regrettable that the Taliban did not respect the ceasefire proposed by the Government. We believe that intra-Afghan dialogue, supported by the international community and the countries of the region, offers the only viable path towards sustainable peace in the country. In that connection, we look forward to the convening of a ministerial conference in Geneva in November so that the international community can revitalize its commitment to peace and development in Afghanistan.

We underscore the need to strengthen Afghanistan's defence and security capabilities to reduce the country's external dependence. Similarly, we stress the importance of supporting the Government's efforts to modernize and boost the economy and generate decent employment for young people, who represent 60 per cent of the population and often fall prey to violent extremism and drug trafficking. In that regard, we note with concern the humanitarian crisis and the displacement of people caused by the drought that is besetting the country. Nearly 1.5 million people require assistance. I would like to conclude by highlighting the work being done by UNAMA, including on the humanitarian front.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We are grateful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing and personal contribution to achieving the goal of peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. We applaud the work and dedication of his able team. We are also grateful to the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, and Afghan youth representative Ramiz Bakhtiar for their statements.

The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/824) provides a realistic assessment and important insights into the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations country team. It includes constructive recommendations that the United Nations system and the international community need to implement right away. At this critical juncture, it would enable us to leverage the comparative advantage of global and regional stakeholders in support of reconstruction and redevelopment in Afghanistan. My delegation would like to make the following key points.

First, with regard to the political process, we share the view of Kabul that the process should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Kazakhstan firmly supports the reconciliation and reintegration efforts undertaken by the Government of Afghanistan and its continued commitment to addressing the increasing political, economic and security challenges. That is strong testimony of Afghanistan's aspirations to achieve national unity and stability, which could contribute to regional security. We welcome President Ghani's recent ceasefire initiative and regret that counterparts have not accepted it. That means that hopes for peaceful elections is under threat. We are equally concerned about the statements made by some political parties in Afghanistan that intend to boycott the elections. Therefore, we encourage the Government to work with political parties and encourage them to participate in the elections. On the other hand, it should not lead to a delay in the holding of the elections, as it would lead to further deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan.

On the security track, despite some noteworthy developments, the situation is fragile and volatile and continues to deteriorate, in particular in the northern provinces. Major losses have been incurred among the civilian population, law enforcement and the military as a result of terrorist acts and clashes by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh and the Taliban. It is cause for serious concern as it could have a negative impact on the holding of free and successful elections in the country. We therefore urge the Government to implement its progressive strategies, such as the plan on security sector reform and many others in other areas, which, in our view, will further strengthen the capacity of national institutions.

With regard to international cooperation, my delegation commends the ongoing efforts to counter various threats, including the scourge of terrorism, trafficking and narcotics in Afghanistan. We believe that at this stage it remains imperative that the United Nations and the international community continue to provide assistance to Afghanistan. We will further support the Kabul process, the efforts of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and regional initiatives, as well as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan. We also welcome the work of our partners from Central Asia, in particular the holding of the Tashkent conference in March and the efforts of the Russian Federation on the Moscow format, while underlining the importance of the SCO Afghanistan Contact Group and the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. We have great hopes for the forthcoming Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan, which will ensure that the Government of Afghanistan is on track to deliver on its reform commitments and discuss prospects for international support.

On the development track, we are heartened to see that it is the policy of the Afghan Government's to put emphasis on social and economic development. The core of our efforts is to help Afghanistan become an attractive partner with great potential. In that vein, we believe it is necessary to proceed in line with provisions

of this year's presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/1) on prevention and sustaining peace and the presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) on modelling regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The country needs joint projects, job creation and regional connectivity. All Central Asian States are committed to long-term cooperation with our Afghan partners and intraregional connectivity in the areas of infrastructure, transit and transport, energy and other fields.

It is necessary to ensure that Afghanistan be included in our region's trade and economic cooperation efforts as part of a new model of relations. My delegation therefore proposes a new strategy, based on the interlinkages of development and security, combined with a revamped regional approach and an innovative whole-of-system United Nations approach to enhance efficiency, transparency and accountability. It is based on our assumption that economic development will create the prerequisites for a political settlement and a solution to security issues. In that regard, we support all projects to empower that idea, such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline, the Lapis Lazuli Corridor and the One Belt-One Road initiative, which could not only bring about economic growth and prosperity, but could also enhance security and stability in the region. Kazakhstan will continue to contribute to bilateral, regional and multilateral action for the recovery, stability, peace and progress of Afghanistan.

With regard to the human dimension, Kazakhstan is deeply convinced that women, along with youth, occupy a central place in the entire cycle of conflict prevention. In that vein, earlier this month in Astana, we organized a regional conference on the theme "Empowering women in Afghanistan", which focused on achieving sustainable economic growth by expanding the capabilities of Afghan women and developing their business activities through regional cooperation, with emphasis on the role of education and new knowledge. Its outcome declaration envisages ways of improving the living and educational conditions of Afghan women and girls, as well as expanding their rights and opportunities, including in the political and economic spheres. As for results, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and the European Union will soon launch a joint pilot project to provide training for Afghan women in Kazakh and Uzbek universities. In addition, the Government of Kazakhstan has decided to allocate additional scholarships for Afghan women for the period 2019-2020, which is a continuation of Kazakhstan's initiative to educate 1,000 Afghan civilian specialists through a $50 million special educational programme.

The plight of Afghan children remains severely affected by the escalation of the conflict. To that end, the Government of Afghanistan has taken many commendable steps to ensure that its national security forces are child-free. It is also promoting age-assessment guidelines that we hope will be widely implemented. However, Kazakhstan is alarmed about the fact that the current reporting period again recorded a high number of child casualties, with the use of boys who were reportedly recruited by terrorist organizations. We therefore welcome the joint efforts of UNAMA and UNICEF to address that challenge.

Finally, my country is pleased that UNAMA, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community have continued to maintain a close partnership, which is vital to ensuring sustainable peace and stability in the country. Kazakhstan will continue to support the brotherly people of Afghanistan in fulfilling their aspirations for peace, prosperity and security, and believes that the timely holding of parliamentary elections will promote the conditions for achieving such goals.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, allow me to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, and Ambassador Saikal for their enlightening briefings on peace efforts and the electoral process. I would also like to warmly thank Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar for his briefing, which clearly illustrated the essential role played by Afghan youth in building a peaceful, democratic, just and united society. In Afghanistan and elsewhere, young people must be fully recognized as agents of sociopolitical change and as key partners in efforts to bring about peace and development. I will make three points today.

First, with regard to the security situation, the conflict in Afghanistan remains one of the deadliest and most violent on the Security Council's agenda. France is very concerned about the increasing number of foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan, as well as by the one-upmanship of the Taliban and the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province, marked by a recent increase in the number of terrorist attacks, in Kabul in particular. We again condemn such attacks, in the strongest terms, and reiterate our solidarity with the

victims of terrorism and their families. France also commends the courage and the determination of the Afghan forces, who were instrumental in retaking the town of Ghazni on 10 August. Nonetheless, such clashes confirm that terrorist groups are determined to continue their harassment in order to destabilize the country at a critical time, by creating a climate of perpetual insecurity and by seeking to undermine the Afghan forces and the authority of the Government just ahead of the elections.

We are also concerned about the continued increase in drug trafficking, which fuels Taliban insurgency and threatens the lives of thousands of Afghans. The presentation of a draft regional strategy by Afghanistan in July in Vienna marks the renewed commitment of the Afghan authorities to combating opiate production and trafficking, which deserves to be highlighted. We call on the countries of the region to resolutely commit to fighting such trafficking at all levels. We look to the Afghan Government to continue the important efforts needed to curb drug production, with the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, regional partners and the international community, within the framework of the principle of shared responsibility, including the Paris Pact Initiative.

Secondly, the parliamentary and local elections scheduled for 20 October constitute a major challenge, given the context that I have just mentioned. France attaches great importance to the democratic process and the holding of free, transparent and credible elections. It is essential that the Afghan population be able to express itself and be represented in the Government. All stakeholders must continue to work to ensure the broadest possible participation of the population in the elections, especially women. We are concerned about the many questions that remain about the preparations for the elections, which may compromise their integrity. We also remain concerned about the low number of candidates in some provinces for district council elections, since a plurality of candidates is an essential criterion for holding credible elections. In that regard, we support the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) alongside the various Afghan stakeholders and the series of measures to combat fraud, promote trust and ensure the inclusivity and security of the elections.

Thirdly, concerning peace efforts, the seriousness of the security situation and the human cost of the conflict should serve to encourage renewed efforts to achieve lasting peace. Progress has been made, notably through the peace offer presented by President Ghani at the second Kabul Conference, on 28 February, and then with the ceasefire for the Eid Al-Fitr holiday and the unilateral Eid Al-Adha ceasefire proposal. France urges the Taliban to respond to those gestures of openness. A lasting solution in Afghanistan can be only political in nature, negotiated through an inclusive Afghan-led process for Afghans. In that respect, it is essential to consult the Afghan population, including young Afghans, in order to take into account their expectations. Beyond Afghanistan, it is important that all States in the region unambiguously support the objective of peace.

The violence and power struggles have lasted far too long. Time for cooperation has come with a view towards peace, democratic good governance and development, which are incumbent upon the Afghan people to achieve, with the support of the international community. The Afghan authorities and UNAMA can count on the steadfast support of France in pursuit of that goal, as well as the unity of the Security Council, which is a critical and indispensable asset to make headway.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing. I am appreciative of the tremendous amount of work that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has carried out under his leadership. I listened very attentively to the statements made by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Saikal, and by the civil society youth representative, Mr. Bakhtiar.

At present, the political process in Afghanistan has entered a critical stage. The security situation is of great concern, and the humanitarian situation is facing challenges. Peace and development in Afghanistan have important bearing on the vital interests of the Afghan people and the security, stability, development and prosperity of the region. China applauds the efforts of the Afghan Government to safeguard national stability, promote national reconciliation and facilitate economic development. We are appreciative of the Government's unremitting efforts. The international community should continue to provide firm support for Afghanistan.

First, we must provide firm support to ensure that major elections in Afghanistan are held smoothly. Afghanistan will hold parliamentary elections in

October and presidential elections in April of next year. Those will be major events in the political process in Afghanistan. As electoral preparations enter a critical stage, all political parties in Afghanistan should strengthen unity, assume national political stability as a shared responsibility and resolve differences through dialogue and consultations. The international community must truly respect the right of the Afghan people to choose their own political system and development path, and provide tailored assistance to the Afghan Government in order to improve its governance capacity.

Secondly, we must help improve the security situation in Afghanistan. The number of civilian casualties caused by the conflict in Afghanistan reached a record high in the first half of this year. The international community should continue to support the capacity-building of the Afghan National Security Forces, jointly respond effectively to such threats as terrorism, transnational organized crime and drug trafficking and help Afghanistan meet those challenges through efforts at the regional level. The Taliban should be urged to respond positively to the Afghan Government's conditional ceasefire and peace initiative in an effort to achieve lasting peace and stability in the country.

Thirdly, we need to pay greater attention to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and take measures to ease the situation. The recent drought has affected the livelihoods of approximately 1.4 million people in Afghanistan, thereby exacerbating the already grave humanitarian situation. The international community should provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people in terms of, inter alia, industrial and residential water supply, food and medical care, and alleviate the humanitarian plight brought on by the drought. Humanitarian support should continue to be given to Afghan refugees and their host countries.

Fourthly, we must promote Afghanistan's economic development and regional cooperation. Afghanistan boasts rich resources and a strategic geographical location, and there are broad prospects for its participation in regional economic cooperation. The international community, on the basis of Afghanistan's national development strategy and specific needs, should help the country to unlock its development potential and continue to deepen its integration into regional economic cooperation.

The relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council have positively affirmed the importance of the Belt and Road Initiative in the promotion of economic development in Afghanistan and regional cooperation. It is our hope that all the relevant parties will jointly promote the development of the Belt and Road Initiative, strengthen regional economic cooperation and interconnectivity and help Afghanistan achieve its economic and social development. We look forward to positive outcomes at the Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be held in November.

China and Afghanistan enjoy long-standing good neighbourly relations. China hopes that Afghanistan will achieve peace, security, stability and development at an early date. The Qingdao Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) reaffirms that the SCO member States will continue to provide support to the Afghan Government and its people in promoting the political process, safeguarding security, advancing economic development and combating terrorism and narcotics trafficking.

China will continue to strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan and other regional countries through various mechanisms, such as the tripartite dialogue among China, Afghanistan and Pakistan; the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, consisting of Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the United States; and the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, in order to jointly respond to terrorist threats and promote regional peace, stability and development.

China will continue to help Afghanistan in leveraging its own strength in its participation in the Belt and Road Initiative and regional economic cooperation. China will also promote the complementarity between the Belt and Road Initiative and other regional cooperation initiatives. Together with the international community, China will work tirelessly to promote an early attainment of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his very informative briefing, as well as for his report on developments in Afghanistan. Special words of gratitude should also be forwarded to the courageous and dedicated team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which supports

governance, development and reconciliation in Afghanistan. I also welcome the presentation made by Ambassador Saikal.

We greatly appreciate the strong motivation and passion demonstrated by Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar in his briefing. The young generation of Afghans embodies hope for the peaceful and sustainable development of the country. The international community should encourage and provide them with effective assistance on their way to a brighter future, without suffering or innocent casualties of violence. When we consider the profound role of the young generation in the reconstruction and development process taking place in Afghanistan, we cannot forget how important it is to allow broad access to education.

Poland reiterates the significance of the peace process, which should be continued through constructive dialogue. In that regard, we recognize President Ghani's numerous efforts aimed at peaceful conflict resolution as an important step forward. We count on the representatives of Taliban groups to respond positively to the offer of peace talks and to take part in an inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

Having said that, we cannot turn a blind eye to the unspoken suffering of the civilian population, especially the women and children of Ghazni in recent weeks. We call for unrestricted access for humanitarian assistance, which is critically needed. We believe that all parties involved should allow aid workers to ease the pain and tragedy of innocent people affected by military operations. Good governance and successful institution-building require adherence to the rules and the procedures that enable all citizens to participate in the democratic process. Poland welcomes the commitment demonstrated by the Afghan Government to conducting transparent, inclusive and credible parliamentary and district council elections. We note that the initiated process faces such challenges as the low number of candidate nominations. That needs to be overcome by the authorities.

The high priority for us remains the wide participation of women, both as candidates and as voters. We see it as a fundamental condition for enhancing peace and security. Poland calls on the Government of Afghanistan to put a particular focus on challenges to women's participation in the forthcoming parliamentary and district council elections. Efforts need to be undertaken urgently by international partners in order to provide concrete support for women's groups so as to ensure women's full participation in every aspect of the electoral process.

The continued violent acts of hostile insurgent groups reminds us of the fundamental importance of maintaining Afghanistan's institutions, specifically those that have the task of ensuring the security and defence of the country and its people. Poland supports and encourages the Afghan Government to continue its efforts to improve the capability of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Those undertakings require determination and engagement, which we will continue to support through training and advisory activities in the framework of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission.

Finally, Poland is concerned over the continued grave violations against children in conflict. Children comprised more than half of civilian casualties documented by UNAMA in aerial strikes and 25 per cent of all civilian casualties during the reporting period. Attacks on schools and mosques accounted for 75 per cent of election-related security incidents. We call on all parties to cease attacks on and military use of schools, and to end attacks on medical facilities and personnel.

Mr. Alahmad (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar, the Afghanistan youth representative, for their comprehensive briefings today. I would also like to take this opportunity to renew the support of the State of Kuwait for all the sincere efforts exerted by Mr. Yamamoto and the members of UNAMA under the difficult circumstances they face there. I also thank the Secretary-General for his quarterly report (S/2018/824), which sheds light on the situation in Afghanistan over the past three months

This meeting is being convened only one month prior to the holding of the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan. Therefore, I will focus in my statement on two main issues linked to the items we are discussing today, namely, political developments and the security situation.

First, with regard to the political developments, the phase in which Afghanistan is currently passing is a

very critical and delicate one. It is a phase in which we are witnessing intensified consultations among the political parties. We are also witnessing the continued preparations by the electoral management bodies to hold parliamentary elections on 20 October. In that regard, we would like first to commend the vital role of UNAMA and the electoral management bodies in finalizing the lists of voters and candidates and setting up voting centres. We also welcome the signing by the United Nations and the electoral management bodies on 25 July of a revised Electoral Support Project document, with the donors pledging an additional $57 million in financial support.

The overall number of 9 million registered men and women voters is a clear demonstration of the desire of the Afghan people to opt for the path of democracy despite the security threats to their lives. We salute the courage of the Afghan people, who emphasize once again that the political solution in Afghanistan must be Afghan-led and determined by the Afghan people.

As we discuss political developments, we should underscore the importance of national reconciliation and the peace process in Afghanistan. We follow closely the ongoing political action in the various Afghan provinces, and the political alliances that have been formed in order to prepare for the upcoming elections. We hope that such action, which involves all political parties, will contribute to reducing tensions and giving priority to national interests above partisan ones. Strengthening national interests has been and continues to be essential. It is of the utmost importance for the Government and all parties to prioritize long-term interests in order to put an end to the Afghan conflict and achieve sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Likewise, the international community must continue to encourage and support these goals in order to reach a comprehensive political settlement in Afghanistan. We welcome the assistance provided by the countries of the region and the relevant regional mechanisms, especially the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which has convened a special meeting on Afghanistan during the past week to reiterate its support to the Afghani Government to bring peace, security and harmony among all the segments of the Afghani people, including its call to the Taliban movement to get involved in a direct, peaceful and unconditional dialogue.

Secondly, with regard to the security situation, the latest report of the Secretary-General underlines the continued instability of the security situation in Afghanistan. Over the past period, we all witnessed the significant increase in terrorist operations due to the proximity of the parliamentary elections. It is with concern that we have followed the continuing clashes between Afghan forces and armed groups, such as the Taliban movement and the terrorist group Da'esh, the latest of which was an attempt by the Taliban to overrun the city of Ghazni on 10 August. That attempt caused numerous casualties among unarmed civilians, including many women and children.

We are fully aware that increased acts of violence and threats are nothing but desperate attempts by elements that do not believe in democracy or human rights, and do not even wish to see stability and security in the country. They think that through those terrorist acts, which target educational and sports centres as well as gathering places, they will be able to terrorize voters and delay the electoral process next October. We hope that the Afghan authorities will redouble their efforts to protect public utilities and fight those stray groups. At the same time, we welcome the commitment of our NATO allies to support the non-combatant mission and provide financial support to the Afghan forces until the year 2024.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait renews its support to Afghanistan to achieve lasting peace and stability through a diplomatic negotiated settlement. We stand with Afghanistan in its war against terrorism and support its unrelenting efforts to spread its authority and sovereignty over its entire territory. We also emphasize that confronting the threat of terrorism lies in the collective commitment to fight and combat this scourge within the framework of the international strategy to combat terrorism.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2018/824). We would also like to thank the Ambassador of Afghanistan and Mr. Ramiz Bhaktiar, representing Afghan youth, for their excellent briefings.

With one month to go until the legislative and district elections, my delegation welcomes the progress

made by the Independent Election Commission in the implementation of the electoral process, specifically by appointing a new Chief Electoral Officer; finalizing the electoral lists and beginning to digitize them; concluding the receipt candidatures; gender mainstreaming in order to increase women's participation in the elections and adopting measures that will allow the media, civil society and political parties to observe and monitor the elections. Côte d'Ivoire also notes the commitment and efforts of the Independent Electoral Commission and UNAMA to organize the elections in a timely manner. Lastly, we also welcome the financial assistance provided by certain countries to those bodies to ensure the proper implementation of the electoral calendar.

Despite those few major advances, my delegation remains concerned about the sociopolitical and security situation in Afghanistan, which could jeopardize the holding of elections in conditions that would guarantee its smooth functioning and credibility.

With regrd to the sociopolitical situation, as the Independent Electoral Commission is preparing to finalize the digitization of voter lists — an important step for the transparency of the electoral process — its headquarters in Kabul and local commissions in eight other provinces were closed due to events organized by individuals whose candidatures were rejected. Amid those tensions, my country urges the Afghan authorities, political actors and all stakeholders to work together to seek the necessary compromises to hold fair, transparent and credible elections on 20 October in a peaceful environment.

In addition, Côte d'Ivoire notes with regret the limited progress made in the implementation of the peace agreement between the Government and the Hezb-e Islami political party. We are concerned about the negative effects that those delays could have on the start of negotiations for a peace agreement with armed groups in the country.

The deteriorating security situation resulting from the Taliban attacks on the Afghan security forces and those by the local branch of Islamic State against the civilian population could jeopardize the participation of many Afghans in the upcoming polls. It is therefore important to strengthen support for the efforts of the Afghan security forces from the international community and the countries contributing to the NATO Resolute Support Mission in order to address the threats posed by armed groups and curb the level of violence in the country. In that regard, my delegation notes with satisfaction the commitment of the contributing countries to the Resolute Support Mission to maintain their presence in the country — if need be — as well as their funding pledges for the Afghan security forces up until 2024. We encourage all forces engaged in Afghanistan to further strengthen joint operations with the country's defence and security forces in the provinces most affected by insecurity, where the conduct of elections is at risk of being undermined.

Some recent positive developments are helping to maintain hope for the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan. They include the cessation of hostilities between the Afghan armed forces and the Taliban during Eid al-Fitr festivities; meetings between Taliban leaders and Afghan political authorities during that period; the meeting of 3,000 religious leaders in Kabul to call the Taliban to the negotiating table with the Afghan political authorities; the increased involvement of civil society in the search for peace through demonstrations and marches and the pooling of initiatives within the framework of regional cooperation to promote the quest for solutions to the Afghan crisis.

Côte d'Ivoire also welcomes the adoption of the Afghan national peace and reconciliation strategy presented by the High Peace Council, as well as the measures taken by the Government of Afghanistan to implement the national action plan on peace, security and women's empowerment.

My country welcomes the progress made by the Afghan Government in its fight against corruption and its quest to reduce the dependence of its economy on foreign aid. We also encourage it to continue its efforts to combat drug trafficking, which serves as a source of financing for terrorism.

My delegation also calls for enhanced cooperation between the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the relevant regional organizations in order to strengthen regional capacities for peace and development.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms the central role of the Kabul process, which remains to this day the benchmark for achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We would like to thank the Secretary General for his comprehensive

report on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2018/824) and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We appreciate the briefing by Special Representative Yamamoto and are grateful to Ambassador Saikal and Mr. Bakhtiar for their remarks.

There is no doubt that Afghanistan still faces multiple and complex challenges to its security, stability and development. Its people continue to pay a heavy price for the instability and violence, not least from the use of indiscriminate improvised explosive devices — the leading cause of civilian casualties during the first half of this year. We reiterate our strong condemnation of the recent terrorist attacks in Kabul and other parts of the country. Once again, we must take this opportunity to express our sympathy and solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan for the loss of a high number of civilian lives.

The long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation and political process. We reiterate our appreciation for the proposal by President Ghani for direct negotiations with the Taliban. We note that it has been receiving broad and strong support from Afghans and the international community. However, that will not make any difference unless and until the Taliban accepts the offer and engages in direct peace talks without any preconditions.

The holding of peaceful and democratic parliamentary and district council elections within the proposed time frame is indeed important, as Special Representative Yamamoto said. The peaceful conduct of any electoral process is critical to enabling people to exercise their right to vote freely, without fear or threat of insecurity, but implementing an inclusive and credible electoral process in that context remains a challenge.

There has certainly been progress in the preparation for the elections, but there is a need to accelerate those efforts and build confidence in the electoral process through the involvement and participation of all relevant stakeholders. That is key to ensuring the timely and successful holding of the elections. All Afghan stakeholders have very important responsibilities in that regard. We hope they will demonstrate the necessary political will and commitment to contribute their part for the sake of lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The peace and security challenge faced by Afghanistan cannot be effectively addressed without sustained and inclusive economic growth and development. That is why the National Unity Government needs the coordinated and comprehensive support of the international community. We must provide every support to encourage and assist the Government in its political reforms and the national development priorities laid out in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. It is vital that the international community sustain its engagement and deliver on its commitments. We sincerely hope that the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan will provide an opportunity for the international community to renew its political commitments to Afghanistan and encourage their implementation.

The continued engagement of the United Nations in support of Afghanistan is absolutely vital at this critical juncture. We commend UNAMA's active engagement with the Government and the people of Afghanistan, in line with its mandate. We hope it will continue to maintain and extend its efforts to promote and support peace talk initiatives, reconciliation and dialogue, as well as its support for the social and economic development of Afghanistan.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing and for the important work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in Afghanistan.

I would also like to thank Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar for sharing his valuable insights this afternoon. With more than 60 per cent of the population in Afghanistan estimated to be under 25-years old, the future clearly lies in the hands of the youth. In line with resolution 2419 (2018), on youth, peace and security, young people should be actively and meaningfully engaged in all decision-making processes, including in the Council.

The only viable solution to the conflict in Afghanistan is an Afghan-owned and -led peace process. In that regard, we commend the unprecedented steps taken by the Afghan Government this year. It is deeply regrettable that the Taliban did not accept the offer of a bilateral ceasefire, and we join others in urging the Taliban to cease all violence and to immediately engage in talks with the Government. A peace process must be inclusive, involving both women and youth, if any agreement is to be sustainable.

As stated by others, the upcoming elections will be decisive for the future of Afghanistan. The ability to ensure credible elections will be a test of the Afghan reform agenda and is crucial for achieving long-term stability and for strengthening democracy. It is a shared responsibility of the Government, the opposition and the electoral management bodies to create the necessary conditions. Responsible institutions must address unresolved preparatory issues without further delay. Any attempt to obstruct the electoral management bodies from carrying out their work is unacceptable. Adequate security measures need to be taken to prevent attacks on the elections and the electoral preparations. Women and men must be able to safely run for elected office, campaign freely and, of course, vote. Special attention should be given to ensuring that women in remote and rural areas are also able to vote. UNAMA has a clear mandate to promote women's participation, and we encourage close cooperation with relevant actors, including UN-Women, in this work.

Coherent and coordinated international support for national peace efforts in Afghanistan is critical. All stakeholders, especially the neighbours, must now act on their commitment to supporting a political solution. The role of UNAMA in backing those efforts remains important. The Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan in November will be an important opportunity to bring key stakeholders together. The Conference should focus on evaluating the reform agenda that has been mutually agreed by Afghanistan and the international community, including the conduct of the parliamentary elections, anti-corruption efforts and the implementation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of Council resolution 1325 (2000).

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is worsening. Due to conflict and drought, about 4.2 million people now need humanitarian assistance. The situation has also led to an increase in internally displaced people. Safe and unhindered access is critical. It is also essential to ensure close coordination between humanitarian and development efforts, including on climate-change mitigation.

The continuous, horrendous attacks in Kabul and around the country, including targeted attacks on girls' schools, religious minorities and journalists, must be condemned in the strongest terms. All attacks on civilians, including those against humanitarian and development workers, are unacceptable. All parties must comply with their obligations under international law. In that context, UNAMA's continued documentation of civilian casualties is important.

With continuous attacks on civilians and a worsening humanitarian situation, the challenges in Afghanistan can sometimes seem overwhelming. But renewed momentum for a peace process and the upcoming elections offer opportunities to change the trajectory. We should jointly seize that opportunity. As a long-standing friend and partner to the people of Afghanistan, Sweden will continue to do its part.

The President: I will now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the United States.

We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing and are particularly grateful to Afghan youth representative Ramiz Bakhtiar for sharing the critical and important perspective of youth and civil society in Afghanistan, and especially regarding the upcoming elections.

Last week, a man wearing a vest armed with explosives walked into a crowd protesting a corrupt local police commander in eastern Afghanistan. The man blew himself up and killed around 70 other people. Hundreds more were wounded. Earlier that same day, a 14-year-old boy was killed and four others were wounded when two bombs went off in front of a school in Jalalabad.

This is the dangerous and difficult situation that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the people of Afghanistan confront as Afghanistan approaches parliamentary elections in October. Violent extremist groups are attempting to sow fear and distrust among the Afghan people. No doubt, their attacks will intensify. It seems they would like to return to the zero-sum, tribal violence of the civil war in the 1990s, which paved the way for the tyrannical rule of the Taliban.

The United States fully supports and hopes for timely, credible, and transparent parliamentary elections in Afghanistan on 20 October, as well as subsequent elections when the Afghan people will choose their president in April 2019. But timely and credible elections will not come about easily. Building a democracy necessarily involves creating trust and confidence among the people in the integrity of the system, along with belief in the ability and willingness of those who are elected to improve the lives of the people. As a first step in that process, there must be

voter registration that is as accurate and transparent as possible, ensuring that women have the opportunity to participate and have their voices heard. And most fundamentally, it depends on the safety of those who would campaign, register and vote in the elections.

Today, preparations for the parliamentary and presidential elections in Afghanistan are at a critical stage. UNAMA plays an essential role in supporting Afghanistan's electoral commissions as they prepare for the vote. We want to specifically recognize and thank Special Representative Yamamoto and his team for their hard work under very difficult conditions. As part of the preparation for timely and credible elections, the United States welcomes the efforts of the Afghan Government to advance a peace process with the Taliban. The people of Afghanistan are calling for peace. President Ghani has responded to their call. The ball is now in the Taliban's court. They must come to the table and enter into peace talks without preconditions.

The Taliban face a decision — they can grow obsolete in the old Afghanistan or they can thrive in a new one. Not just the Taliban, but all of us, are at an inflection point in the Afghan conflict. A prosperous and secure future for Afghanistan can be created only by and through the will of its people. This is the goal to which the Security Council, international donors and the international community more broadly must devote themselves in the critical weeks and months ahead.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to express our appreciation to Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing, and Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for his statement. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/824).

Today we are meeting at yet another critical juncture for Afghanistan. As we approach the midpoint of the transformation decade, significant progress in the country has been achieved on multiple fronts, including in the political, economic and security fields. However, complex challenges remain to be addressed for the establishment and consolidation of peace, security and prosperity in Afghanistan. We look forward to the holding of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan later this year, which will provide an important opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its commitment to assisting Afghanistan in its efforts to secure a better future. This afternoon, I will focus on three key issues in this regard.

First, with regard to the upcoming elections in the country, we are about one month away from the holding of parliamentary elections in Afghanistan, which are scheduled for 20 October. The successful holding of these elections is important for all of our efforts aimed at helping Afghanistan achieve stability, security and prosperity. However, severe and frequent criticism of the election process is becoming a source of concern, as this may lead to circumstances that could result in the disenfranchisement of a large number of voters. The deteriorating security situation might also give way to similar results. We still hope that effective and swift measures will be taken to rectify this situation.

The fragmented political environment in Afghanistan continues to be another point of concern. We call upon all members of the National Unity Government, as well as other prominent political actors, to act together and join efforts aimed at holding credible elections and advancing the peace process.

That brings me to my second point, on the efforts for establishing sustained peace and reconciliation. An Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process remains central to achieving long-lasting peace in the country. We welcome the encouraging steps that were recently taken by the Afghan Government to this effect. In this regard, we were pleased that the temporary ceasefire during Eid al-Fitr was respected. This unprecedented development vividly displayed the sincere aspiration of the Afghan people for peace. It is regrettable that a similar ceasefire could not be repeated during Eid al-Adha. I would like to reiterate that Turkey continues to stand ready to contribute to the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation efforts. The security, stability and prosperity of Afghanistan are of key importance for neighbouring countries and the region, as well as for the maintenance of global peace and security.

My third and last point is on the need to strengthen regional cooperation efforts. We believe that the need to address the challenges that Afghanistan continues to face remains an important priority for countries of the region and the international community as a whole. Building and consolidating a genuine atmosphere of trust

and cooperation remains essential for strengthening regional collaboration efforts in a mutually beneficial manner. Our vision for Afghanistan continues to be a peaceful, secure and stable country that enjoys good and cooperative relations with its neighbours while being at the centre of major regional cooperation projects in infrastructure, trade and transportation.

With this understanding, Turkey continues to contribute to regional cooperation efforts for Afghanistan. We are pleased to co-chair the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process this year, together with Afghanistan, in line with our continued support. The second senior officials meeting of the Process will take place here in New York on 28 September, at the margins of the high-level week of the General Assembly. Review of the implementation of the confidence-building measures within the framework of the Process will be one of the agenda items. We look forward to a fruitful discussion at this meeting.

Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is carrying out under the leadership of Special Representative Yamamoto in assisting the Afghan Government and people in their endeavours to achieve a stable, peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan. I would also like to reiterate Turkey's commitment to continuing to stand by the Government of Afghanistan and our Afghan brothers and sisters as long as our help is needed.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): I, too, should like to begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing.

The situation in Afghanistan remains a source of concern for the entire international community. A long war continues, exacerbated by terrorism, ethnic and regional tensions, and a fragile economy. The Afghan people continue their epic suffering, with another record-high period in civilian casualties, attested by the Secretary General's report (S/2018/824). As Human Rights Watch put it, "civilians are losing the war in Afghanistan". The recent upsurge in violence has compounded the prolonged suffering of the Afghan people. We strongly condemn all terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. There can be no justification for the indiscriminate killing of innocent children, women and men.

Apart from Afghanistan itself, no country has suffered more from the four decades of war, turmoil and foreign interventions in Afghanistan, and no country has more to gain from peace there, than mine, Pakistan. For many years, Imran Khan, Pakistan's recently elected Prime Minister, has declared that peace in Afghanistan can be restored only through a negotiated political settlement between the principal parties. In his very first address to the nation after the elections, Prime Minister Khan reaffirmed Pakistan's support for peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was also the first country to be visited by Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Hussain Qureshi over the last weekend, which is a clear signal of the importance that our new Government attaches to its relations with Afghanistan and of its commitment to promoting peace and stability in that country. His message in Kabul was that Pakistan remained ready to play a constructive role in facilitating peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

There are some signs that a negotiated end to Afghanistan's protracted war may be possible. Hopes for peace received a boost last June when President Ashraf Ghani announced a ceasefire on the religious festival of Eid al-Fitr, and the Afghan Taliban did the same. For a few days, the ceasefire was comprehensively observed across the country by the Government and the Tehrik-e Taliban Afghanistan. Apart from the general desire for peace, the ceasefire affirmed that peace was possible if the principal parties in Afghanistan desired it.

Pakistan welcomes the Trump Administration's acknowledgement that a negotiated political settlement is the best option for bringing its longest war to an end. Pakistan has urged this course of action for well over a decade. The United Nations and the international community have consistently declared that there is no military solution to the conflict and that it must be ended through a negotiated political settlement.

Agreement on launching a negotiating process is, however, neither simple nor easy. Several past attempts have been aborted by unilateral actions. There is little trust between the main antagonists. Preconditions have been set by some of the main parties to commence and continue a dialogue process. The principal responsibility for seizing the moment rests on the parties directly involved in the Afghan conflict. Unless they display flexibility, serious negotiations for a political settlement could be further delayed. To create

an environment for peace talks, all sides should agree on a de-escalation of violence, if not a cessation of violence. For its part, Pakistan will actively encourage, support and facilitate all efforts to launch a credible and serious peace process.

A negotiated peace and national reconciliation is all the more essential to enable the Afghan people and the international community to confront and eliminate the growing presence of Da'esh in Afghanistan. Da'esh and a number of terrorist groups operating under its umbrella, including the Tehrik-i-Taliban and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, pose a threat to Afghanistan, its neighbours and, indeed, to the world. We agree with the Russian delegation that an international effort is needed to defeat Da'esh in Afghanistan.

Cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is a vital component of the endeavour to realize peace and security within Afghanistan and the entire region. Strengthening bilateral relations is a priority for my country's new Government. The Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity provides a framework for comprehensive and structured engagement between our two countries. The inaugural session of that body was held in Kabul in July, and the operationalization of its five working groups will enable us address all bilateral issues, including broadening economic interaction, border management and refugee repatriation.

We have taken a number of initiatives to support Afghanistan's economic development. At Kabul's request, Pakistan waived regulatory duties on imports from Afghanistan. As a result, a substantial increase in Afghan exports to Pakistan has been recorded in 2018.

We are also ready to extend all possible support to Kabul to overcome the growing challenge posed by illicit drug production and trade. The international community, too, should do more to help Afghanistan in developing a comprehensive strategy to address that problem.

Finally, let me say that the bonds of blood, language, faith, geography and history that bind the peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan to each other are immutable and unbreakable. Our destinies are, and will always remain, intertwined. Cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is in the mutual and vital interests of both countries. We stand committed to working with the Afghan Government for the improvement of our bilateral relationship and for the promotion of peace and stability — in both our countries and across the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Arbeiter (Canada): I would first like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his informative briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. I also express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar for his briefing. I now follow him on Twitter, and so I know that today was both exciting and nerve-wracking for him, but I must tell him that I hope we live up to his expectations and, by extension, to the aspirations of all Afghan youth.

I will cover three points today: the situation of youth, the Geneva Ministerial Conference and the upcoming parliamentary elections.

With regard to youth, Canada commends the Security Council for having focused this quarterly debate on this topic. As many other have noted, in a country where over 60 per cent of the population is under the age of 25, involving young people and including their views in identifying solutions is more important than ever. If Canada is elected to serve on the Security Council for the period 2021-2022, we can be counted upon to support a continued and expanded effort to regularly include youth voices in such debates. In Afghanistan, it is clear that equitable access to social services, including education, remains an essential component of supporting youth. That is especially important for girls and young people from ethnic and religious minorities.

The progress made since 2001 in terms of child enrolment in schools is nothing short of remarkable. Nevertheless, approximately 4 million children, most of them girls, remain outside of school today. Their enormous untapped potential prompted the Afghan Ministry of Education to work with Canada and other donors to develop a community-based policy that increases access to education in rural and remote locations. Leading that policy, Canada is proud to have helped establish more than 9,200 community-based schools serving 273,000 students, over 80 per cent of whom are girls.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada looks forward to participating in the forthcoming Geneva Ministerial Conference on

Afghanistan, to be held in November, and will be paying keen attention to the Afghan Government's own assessment of progress made to date and its planned approach to address remaining obstacles. We hope to hear more about how they intend to continue increasing the participation of women in public affairs and reducing gender-based violence. We hope to learn more about the implementation of its policies to strengthen budget transparency and increase Government accountability, especially in the security sector. And we eagerly await an update on its efforts to enhance Government capacity to deliver services and ensure good governance. All of those areas will be critical for the success of the transformation decade.

The forthcoming parliamentary elections are another important milestone. It was my personal privilege to be in Afghanistan ahead of the historic presidential elections in 2004 and to help organize training for staff of the new Afghan Parliament in 2006. I met many incredible volunteers, officials and politicians from across Afghanistan and was struck then, as now, by the depth of their commitment to their country and the remarkable diversity of their perspective and experience.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada remains fully committed to supporting Afghanistan as it seeks to leverage that diversity, including by advancing the full participation of women and marginalized communities in the upconubg elections. As is the case everywhere, women's full and equal participation in decision-making processes strengthens both the processes and the decisions themselves, leading to better, more sustainable results. In that regard, I commend the Independent Election Commission for its gender policy and for its concrete efforts to enhance women's political participation. I also want to cite the tremendous efforts of civil society actors like the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan and the Afghan Women's Education Center for promoting the rights of women and girls and of ethnic and religious minorities.

We likewise welcome the work of the United Nations and other partners to distribute ballots in rural areas ahead of the elections. We encourage the Afghan national authorities to continue to actively address irregularities and to promote and protect the rights of those in rural communities, especially women candidates and voters, to participate in civic affairs and political life. Their inclusion is essential to the integrity of the elections.

As Afghanistan approaches the half-way mark of its transformation decade, the Secretary-General is right to point to the urgent need for political leaders to demonstrate unity of purpose in guiding Afghanistan towards greater stability and self-reliance. We look to the Afghan Government to lead, as no doubt do Afghanistan's young people. Canada will continue to work with the Afghan Government, our United Nations and international partners and with civil society in this effort — because we know that, by working together, we can help young people like Mr. Bakhtiar build a peaceful, inclusive and resilient Afghanistan, which he embodies so vividly for us all.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I thank the United States presidency for having convened the present debate on the situation in Afghanistan. I also thank Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, for his thoughtful presentation; young Ramiz Bakhtiar, the first youth envoy of Afghanistan, for his passionate call to the Security Council to support the aspirations of Afghanistan's young people; and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto, for his briefing.

The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/824) and the statements made earlier today portray the deteriorating security situation resulting from the growing insurgency, linked with criminal and terrorist networks. The challenges posed by the deteriorating situation do not mean we should simply accept the death toll as inevitable. Rather, they should stir us to strengthen our collective spirit of support to the Government and the people of Afghanistan and the brave Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to counter the inhumanity of those who have banded together to ruthlessly brutalize the lives of the ordinary people of Afghanistan.

The Security Council deals with multiple conflict situations. Many of them are addressed many times over each quarter. The situation in Afghanistan, by any measure, now warrants that the business-as-usual approach followed to date be reviewed. The Council's manner of addressing the issue through quarterly debates and an annual resolution may have served the purpose in the past. The present situation

requires greater attention to examine whether it is commensurate with the danger to regional peace and security emanating from the conflict in Afghanistan.

During the past few months, we have followed with hope and anticipation the various peace efforts and overtures by the Government and people of Afghanistan towards bringing peace to their war-torn country. The Taliban, unfortunately, have rejected the recent calls for a ceasefire by the Afghan Government and civil society, including various religious leaders. In fact, they have tended to treat such overtures with growing disdain and have increased their offensive operations as the country prepares for parliamentary elections.

All of us know and believe that there is no military solution to the issue. Yet the Taliban, aided by its supporters, continue to pursue military operations and to perpetrate violence and destruction, such as the recent attack in Ghazni, over several parts of Afghanistan. Those offensives are planned and launched by those who are harboured in safe havens in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan. Those sanctuaries have provided safety for years for the dark agendas of ideologically and operationally fused terror networks like the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Da'esh, Al-Qaida and its proscribed affiliates, such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The agendas of those organizations draw financial sustenance not only from extortion and forced levies and taxes, but also benefit significantly from criminal networks operating drug cartels and stealing Afghanistan's natural resources. By some estimates, 60 per cent of the Taliban's revenues are from the drug trade. Poppy cultivation is said to be the largest cash crop in Taliban-controlled areas.

Resolution 2405 (2018), adopted earlier this year, focuses on linkages among extremism, terrorism, drug production and illegal exploitation of Afghanistan's natural resources. However, it falls short of expectations in striving to cripple the Taliban's drug trade. The Secretary-General's current report also fails to address that very key issue in an adequate matter.

Let us not forget that templates are available for curbing illicit trade by terrorist networks. For example, it is estimated that, when targeted, the Islamic State's oil revenues fell over by nearly 90 per cent over three years, from a monthly high of $50 million to just $4 million. By contrast, the opium produced in Taliban-controlled areas is estimated to account for 85 per cent of global illicit production, valued between $1.5 billion and $3 billion. We feel it is time for the Council to try to replicate the success of the international community against the Islamic State's illicit business in Syria and Iraq by similarly crippling the Taliban's illicit drug trade. We hope that this important subject will be addressed by the Secretary-General in his next report, and by the Council thereafter.

India is willing to work with all countries in the region and beyond, while keeping Afghan priorities at the forefront, so as to bring about a lasting solution for the situation. Afghans should lead those efforts, not only between Governments but with civil society and business as stakeholders. India stands ready to support Afghanistan in every way it can. Our focus remains on the economic pillar of stability and reliable connectivity for the people of Afghanistan. We strongly believe that the lack of connectivity directly impacts the economic, security and political situation in Afghanistan, and we want to address that crucial issue for the benefit of the Afghan people.

For its part, it is time for the Council to look beyond routine consideration to chart a more innovative way forward, so that the spiral of violence that is affecting the life of common Afghans is reversed.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/804), and Special Representative Yamamoto and Afghan youth representative Bakthiar for their briefings. I also thank our good friend Ambassador Saikal for his statement.

The political and security landscape has witnessed many changes since President Ghani's unprecedented peace offer at the meeting of the Kabul process in February. The European Union has wholeheartedly welcomed the Kabul initiative, which has greatly increased the chance of the holding of talks led by the Afghan Government on a genuine peace process.

President Ghani's offer of a ceasefire in mid-June generated additional momentum for peace and showed every Afghan and the entire world that peace is possible. Grassroots movements for peace were another manifestation of the Afghan desire for peace and stability.

Unfortunately, in recent weeks we have observed an increase in violence, including the Taliban's attack on Ghazni. That resulted in further suffering for the Afghan population. The Taliban also registered substantial numbers of casualties in different provinces, underlining the tremendous costs of a strategy that seeks advantage in the battlefield rather than entering peace talks. Reckless spoilers of peace also remain active, in particular the Islamic State.

The European Union remains a steadfast supporter and promoter of peace. We will continue to help broaden the political consensus for peace by cooperating closely with the United Nations, whose assistance and facilitation remain essential. The European Union reiterates its willingness to actively accompany that process, while underlining in particular the regional dimension of any successful peace process. A stable and prosperous Afghanistan is in the interests of all its neighbours. The EU will consider all available incentives and constraints to help foster such a development.

We are now looking forward to the Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan. In the spirit of the Brussels Conference of 2016, we expect Geneva to be another key moment in support for the Afghan Government's reform agenda and to send a strong message on peace. The Afghan Government must demonstrate progress on the implementation of the reform package it committed to during the Brussels Conference. We also look forward to the Geneva mutual accountability framework, which should set concrete and measurable indicators for further reforms. All those reforms are consubstantial with peace efforts.

Peace, self-reliance and regional cooperation and connectivity should be our guiding principles at Geneva. We see in particular the need to agree on lasting anti-corruption measures, for which we look forward to an updated set of concrete and measurable indicators. In the same vein, we will emphasize credible implementing measures on human rights, reinforcing relevant legislation.

In July, the EU disbursed the second tranche of the State Building Contract for Afghanistan — in the amount of €98 million. We hope that will contribute to further advancing economic growth and job creation for the benefit of the Afghan people.

On 20 October, Afghanistan will organize parliamentary elections. It is an important event, long-awaited by the Afghan population. Those elections must take place in a democratic, transparent and credible way. It will also be a test case for the presidential elections in 2019. We encourage the Afghan authorities to continue improving the electoral governance system. Much remains to be done, both at the technical level and in the political sphere. With regard to the latter, the EU calls on all parties and political representatives to respect the electoral process and its institutions.

The EU and its member States will continue to work together in support of the Afghan electoral process. We have committed €15.5 million to assist with the parliamentary elections under the coordination of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The EU will also deploy an election experts mission for the parliamentary elections.

We applaud the readiness of the Afghan Government to engage on all youth-related matters, including in the light of the implementation of resolution 2419 (2018), on youth and peace and security. Considering the needs of that most sizeable age group, the youth perspective deserves the fullest attention, including in terms of political participation.

The European Union continues its structured dialogue with Afghanistan under the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development. We are following up on the results of the meeting of the EU-Afghanistan Special Working Group on Human Rights, Good Governance and Migration held on 5 May in Kabul. We encourage the Afghan authorities to continue to implement the relevant legislation, with particular focus on areas such as the elimination of violence against women, the use of the national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), the protection of children and the prevention of torture and ill treatment.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the high level of civilian casualties and the increasing number of displaced people. The EU calls on all parties to protect the civilian population, especially women and children. In that regard, we support efforts by the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission to provide further training, advice and assistance for the Afghan

security forces and institutions. We need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and respect their impartiality and humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable.

In conclusion, this is a very important moment for Afghanistan. We should not lose the positive momentum for peace generated in June. The three-month conditional ceasefire proposed by President Ghani in August is still valid. We encourage all parties to the conflict, starting with the Taliban, to respond positively.

Lastly, the European Union strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by UNAMA and all United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people. The European Union remains committed to working alongside UNAMA and international partners to achieve a democratic and self-sustainable Afghanistan.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement just made on behalf of the European Union.

I would like to comment briefly on three points: the peace process, elections and the role of Afghan youth. However, first of all, allow me to thank Special Representative Yamamoto, not only for his briefing, but also for his tireless efforts to bring about peace in Afghanistan.

I would also like to express our deepest condolences to the Afghan people and their Government following the recent terrorist attacks. In particular, I condemn the recent wave of horrific attacks on schools and children. Impunity for the perpetrators of such crimes is out of the question.

First of all, with regard to the peace process, the Kabul process, supported by the Tashkent conference, must form the basis for a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled peace process. It is essential that the international community and the countries of the region provide coordinated support to the Government's efforts. In that regard, we also welcome the recent progress made on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, as well as the support expressed by Prime Minister Khan of Pakistan following his recent election.

Despite the recent and courageous peace initiatives taken by President Ghani and his National Unity Government, violence continues unabated. There have never been so many civilian casualties since 2009. We deplore the fact that the Taliban leaders have not responded positively to the Government's overtures. We call on them to participate in peace negotiations. In addition, we are also deeply concerned about the lack of humanitarian access.

With regard to the elections, Belgium commends the Government on its substantial efforts to organize free, credible and inclusive elections to be held on 20 October. We commend the people of Afghanistan for having the courage to register for the elections despite the major security challenges. We welcome the considerable efforts of the electoral authorities to ensure the transparency of the process and call for close and constructive cooperation among the Government, opposition parties and the Independent Election Commission. Political leaders are responsible for helping to build trust in the process. Belgium calls on the Taliban not to sabotage the electoral process through violence or other forms of intimidation. With regard to inclusiveness, we note that women account for approximately 15 per cent of the candidates for the lower house of Parliament and 34 per cent of the 9.5 million registered voters. We welcome the approval of the Independent Election Commission's gender policy and hope that it will lead to greater number of women participating in the process.

Insecurity, poverty and unemployment continue to have a serious impact on Afghan youth. Drought has affected livelihoods and led to additional population displacements. The impatience of the Afghan people, in particular their youth, for lasting peace is becoming increasingly clear. Recent civil society initiatives demonstrate the willingness and constructive spirit of young Afghans, who are increasingly calling for lasting peace and are ready to assume their responsibility during the elections. I again deplore the recent attacks on schools, which infringe upon the fundamental right of young people to education and demonstrate the importance of the swift and full implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration. Belgium welcomes the criminalization of child-related offences in the new penal code. The measure is essential for protecting the most vulnerable members of society. Belgium calls on the Afghan Government to implement the new legislation. We are also very concerned about the use of child soldiers and reports of the sexual abuse of boys and of violence against women.

In conclusion, we attach great importance to peace in Afghanistan, its economic prosperity and relations with its neighbours and the rest of the world. Like our European partners, we will follow developments with interest and attention in the coming months.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Ms. Zappia (Italy): Italy fully aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/824), and to Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing and dedication. I would also like to recognize Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar and thank him for sharing his experience and perspective with us. We, too, will start following him on Twitter.

Italy supports the ongoing efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to defeat terrorism and violent extremism. We remain concerned about the continuing fragility of the security situation and the alarming number of civilian casualties. Together with its allies and partners, Italy has renewed its active commitment to the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission as a Framework Nation and will also remain one of the main contributors to capacity-building efforts in support of the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces. Such commitments are underscored by the shared understanding that the only road to lasting peace in Afghanistan is through reconciliation leading to a political settlement. We commend the Government's courageous initiative in that regard, which we fully support. However, the fact that the most recent ceasefire was not reciprocated by the Taliban demonstrates that the road to peace is still long. Efforts to bring about peace in Afghanistan will require patience, determination and unity of purpose.

We underline once again the crucial facilitation efforts of international and, especially, regional stakeholders, who can help foster the conditions for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process. The Government's efforts to advance reconciliation are taking place against a backdrop full of significant milestones in Afghanistan, with parliamentary elections on 20 October and presidential elections in 2019. It has been eight years since the last parliamentary elections. We cannot overstate the importance that the men and women of Afghanistan be able to cast their vote in a credible, transparent and inclusive manner. We hope that all political forces will remain fully engaged in that process, and we support the active involvement of civil society groups in ensuring that the vote is free and fair.

The Government's commitments in the electoral sphere are part of the broader efforts to effectively implement much-needed reforms in a wide range of areas, such as women's empowerment, good governance and anti-corruption. In pursuing the reform agenda, the needs and the potential of Afghan youth must be fully taken into consideration. Evaluating the progress on that reform agenda will be the cornerstone of the Geneva Ministerial Conference in November. Italy looks forward to the conference as an opportunity to draw a comprehensive assessment of the state of play in the partnership for peace and prosperity agreed between the Government of Afghanistan and the international donors two years ago in Brussels.

In closing, allow me to reiterate Italy's appreciation for the exceptional work carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, under Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto's leadership, in an environment that continues to pose numerous challenges.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening the quarterly debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as well as Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and Mr. Ramiz Bakhtiar for their briefings.

In Uzbekistan we are continuing to closely follow the situation in Afghanistan, given the upcoming parliamentary elections, because the prospects of stable and sustainable development in Central Asia are directly intertwined with the achievement of durable peace in that country. Given the circumstances, Uzbekistan strives to make its own contribution to the international community's efforts in advancing the peace process in Afghanistan. As some of my colleagues have mentioned today, Uzbekistan hosted an international conference on Afghanistan in March, entitled "Afghanistan: Peace Process, Security Cooperation And Regional Connectivity", which was convened at the joint initiative of Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani.

At the end of the conference, high-ranking officials from 21 States and leading international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, adopted the Tashkent Declaration, which calls for the full support of the international community for the Afghan Government's proposal to launch direct negotiations with the Taliban, without any preconditions, in an effort to achieve a comprehensive peace agreement.

The participants in the conference urged the Taliban to accept that proposal and to start an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. It was specifically underlined that all parties would benefit from a comprehensive peace process, which should also guarantee the inclusion of the Taliban in the political process as a legitimate political player. In turn, the Taliban movement should recognize its own responsibility for peace and stability in the country, renounce violence and cut ties with international terrorists groups, as well as respect equal rights for all Afghans, in accordance with the main provisions of the Constitution.

As a practical step in facilitating a peace process in Afghanistan and in implementing the Tashkent Declaration, the Uzbek side recently held negotiations with representatives of the Taliban from the movement's Qatar-based political commission. During the meeting held in Tashkent on 7 August, the Uzbek side underlined the importance of enforcing a ceasefire and its extension for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as the implementation of large-scale economic projects in the country.

One should underline that Uzbekistan closely coordinates with the highest leadership of Afghanistan all of its efforts pertaining to negotiations and contacts with the Taliban movement. The Uzbek side conducts prior consultations with the Afghan authorities on its meetings or negotiations with the Taliban and informs them about their outcomes. In particular, on 28 August a delegation of Uzbekistan, led by Minister for Foreign Affairs Abdulaziz Kamilov, visited Afghanistan and held a number of meetings, including with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib and Deputy Foreign Minister Nasir Andisha. The Afghan side has been fully briefed on the outcomes of the Tashkent negotiations with the Taliban.

From Uzbekistan's perspective, contacts with the Taliban are a necessary prerequisite to creating conditions for the peace process in Afghanistan and to encouraging the Taliban to take up direct talks with the Government. In Tashkent, we strongly believe that peace in Afghanistan can be achieved only through national reconciliation, with the involvement in the negotiation process of the representatives of the Taliban movement.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to emphasize that ultimate peace on Afghan soil would open up new opportunities and bring real benefits to all States of the greater Eurasian continent. It would advance common security and stability, create conditions favourable to the construction of highways and railroads, the laying of pipelines and the development of regional and transregional trade, thereby contributing to ensuring peace and stability in that vast region.

Uzbekistan will therefore continue its efforts to support the earliest launch of the peace process between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement, without any preconditions, aimed at creating a peaceful future for all people of Afghanistan. In that regard, Uzbekistan remains committed to continue close collaboration with the United Nations, the Government of Afghanistan and other stakeholders in advancing the peace process in the country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

In my own statement, I would like to focus on three issues in particular.

First, I would like to speak on the elections, as so many previous speakers have done. Preparations are taking place amid enormous challenges in terms of logistics, security and the political climate. For the first time, Afghan institutions are taking on those challenges on their own, and thanks to their efforts, preparations are largely on track today — at least in a technical sense, as we learned in the briefing — despite all obstacles. It is crucial that those parliamentary elections, which have been postponed several times, do take place. Equally important is that they must be held in a timely, free, fair and transparent manner. The Afghan people deserve no less, just as they deserve

more progress in fighting corruption, establishing the rule of law and respecting human rights.

Secondly, with respect to the peace process, with its offer of unconditional talks and the unprecedented June ceasefire, the Afghan Government has shown great courage for the sake of peace, even while the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces are putting their lives at risk to defend Afghan citizens against attacks every day. Those acts of statesmanship on the part of President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah command our respect. Efforts should now be focused on initiating direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban. Confidence-building measures, such as ceasefires, are useful, but the Taliban must not be allowed to garner international credit while running away from the negotiating table.

The countries of the region, many of which have already spoken today, can contribute greatly. In particular, the policy statements issued by the new Pakistani Government have raised hopes. We have seen some encouraging signs. There is now an opportunity to end the conflict in Afghanistan if Afghans and the international community lend their united support.

Thirdly and lastly, with regard to the importance of Afghanistan's young generation, we watched with great satisfaction as Mr. Bakthiar — the first-ever Afghan youth representative to the United Nations — so aptly briefed the Council today. I thank him very much for that. The average age in Afghanistan, as we have already heard today, is just a little more than 18. More than 40 per cent of its population is under the age of 14. Against that background, it is a truism that children and young people play a tremendously important role in Afghan society. It is also true that we need to increase efforts in basic education, child protection and including younger people in the political process, especially younger women. We see encouraging signs in that regard, but more has to be done.

Germany actively contributes to academic infrastructure and formation in Afghanistan. In the field of information technology (IT), Germany supported the creation of several university IT centres, an IT department at the Ministry of Higher Education, and the IT Competence Centre of Afghanistan in Kabul, as well as the establishment of a computer science master's programme for Afghan lecturers, to offer a few examples.

In conclusion, Germany continues to support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and commends the Head of UNAMA for his great work, as well as the United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. Germany remains deeply committed to the Afghan people, in close cooperation with the Afghan Government and our international partners. We will certainly make this issue a focus of our upcoming term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): With one month to go, Australia is encouraged by preparations for Afghanistan's parliamentary elections. We urge the Government of Afghanistan to maintain its focus on delivering an inclusive and credible electoral process that will accurately reflect the will of the Afghan people. We also acknowledge the bravery and commitment of the Afghan people, who by registering have asserted their right to participate in free and democratic elections despite intimidation, threats and, tragically, violence. Consistent with our support for Afghanistan's security and development, Australia will contribute $5 million to the United Nations Electoral Support Project to assist with the holding of the 2018 parliamentary elections and the 2019 presidential elections.

As reflected in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/824), 2018 has been an especially bloody year. The continuing cost of the conflict, borne by civilians and the Afghan security forces alike, continues to deepen the wounds of a country tired of war. We deeply regret the continuing violence outlined in the report, and condemn the brutal and illegitimate attacks by insurgent groups, Daesh-inspired groups, Al-Qaida, its affiliates and other terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan. Together with our allies and partners in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Australia is committed to supporting Afghanistan to meet the challenges posed by those groups.

Australia welcomes Afghan Government leadership in seeking dialogue with the Taliban as an important step towards ending the conflict. President Ghani's offer in February of negotiations without preconditions, his unilateral June ceasefire and his August invitation to the Taliban to join an extended ceasefire are bold and unprecedented steps. We reaffirm Australia's support for the Kabul process, and encourage Afghanistan to

use it to draw together peace initiatives into a coherent, coordinated, non-partisan pathway to a sustainable Afghan-owned and -led political settlement. We call on the Taliban to honourably reciprocate the Government's ceasefire offer so as to reduce violence and create space for a broad-based and inclusive political process.

We stand with Afghanistan as it works to build on the political and popular momentum for peace. The hundreds of courageous Afghans marching from Helmand to Kabul during Ramadan is a powerful symbol of hope that should drive current and future Afghan Governments to set aside political differences to deliver on the people's priority of a more secure future. We further call on Afghanistan's neighbours to do all they can to encourage the Taliban to come to the negotiating table. Pakistan especially could have an important role in bringing about a negotiated peace in Afghanistan by taking sustained and decisive measures against insurgent groups that threaten regional peace and stability.

We note, in addition to many other challenges, that Afghanistan is facing an imminent food shortage that would affect two thirds of the country. An estimated 1.3 million people are likely to need emergency food and nutrition assistance. Australia will continue to help respond, including through our recent multi-year funding commitment to support the World Food Programme in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, Australia continues to value the role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan under the able leadership of Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, in coordinating the United Nations and broader international efforts in Afghanistan. We appreciate the United Nations hosting the forthcoming Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan and look forward to the conference — halfway through the transformation decade — as an opportunity to take stock of Afghanistan's progress and to reaffirm our shared commitments to peace and development.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): We extend our gratitude for the organization of this meeting. We also extend our gratitude to Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan for his statement. I should also like to thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing.

At a time when Afghanistan is experiencing such severe hardships, what it needs most is further robust and sustained international support. That is of the utmost importance in order to respond to the country's existing challenges, achieve lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region and promote its sustainable socioeconomic development. As a neighbouring country, Iran continues to contribute to and support the promotion of Afghanistan's stability, political-security conditions and socioeconomic development. Certain efforts are under way to ensure that such a contribution is carried out in an institutionalized and sustained manner.

We also continue our endeavours to promote regional efforts in support of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. In that regard, the development plan for Iran's Chabahar port will indeed have a significant impact on the promotion of trade and economic cooperation with Afghanistan. Any attempt to disrupt that vital project will play only into the hands of those who do not want peace and progress for the Afghan people.

Security remains Afghanistan's major challenge. It is one of the main requirements for long-term stability and socioeconomic development in Afghanistan. Therefore, enhancing its security situation should be pursued as a high priority. In that context, counter-terrorism efforts must have the highest priority. The recent terrorist acts, which claimed the lives of innocent civilians, further prove that the threat of terrorist groups, including Daesh, should not be underestimated. Iran will continue to support Afghanistan's Government in its struggle against terrorist groups. The need for sustained regional and international support in countering terrorists in Afghanistan is crucial. However, it needs to be achieved in a realistic manner.

Another source of concern in the security field in Afghanistan is the increase in civilian casualties. That includes the targeting of Shia communities and religious sites, resulting in high civilian casualties. That trend needs to be thwarted.

To enhance democracy, political institutions and national unity in Afghanistan, every effort should be made to ensure that the upcoming elections are held and result in success for the country. Iran will continue its constructive role in that regard.

We continue to support and commend the dedicated work of UNAMA and United Nations agencies in providing development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. Sustained ownership and partnership with the Afghan Government are needed in order to utilize the best potential of UNAMA and the United Nations system to deliver the necessary services in priority areas, as advised by Afghanistan's Government.

Despite the progress achieved, there remain challenges and threats in Afghanistan that need further sustained international support. In that context, we welcome the convening of the Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan that is to take place in November. The international community should remain resolute in securing a stable and prosperous Afghanistan. In turn, Iran will continue its full support to the fraternal people and Government of Afghanistan in their endeavour to achieve lasting peace and prosperity in their country. That is what they deserve.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8355

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8355th meeting

Tuesday, 18 September 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Jeffrey	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/845)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/845)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/845, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) .

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: I welcome you to the Security Council, Mr. President. I am delighted to see you here, in view of your new important role, which in my opinion has already shown the further engagement of your country in this complex environment. I thank you for being here and for presiding over this meeting.

Let me start with yesterday's developments on Idlib. They are important. As Council members know, Idlid has been a major source of concern for all of us in thic Chamber and beyond. Yesterday, Russian President Putin and Turkish President Erdoğan reached an agreement to establish a demilitarized zone within the Idlib de-escalation zone. The Government of Syria has welcomed the agreement — as we saw recently — and confirmed its full coordination with the Russian Federation in that regard.

We in the Secretariat — and I believe the Secretary-General has also been very clear on this — welcome the fact that diplomacy has produced progress in the effort to address the challenges posed by Security Council-listed terrorist groups while protecting civilians — up to 3 million of them, including 1 million children. This represents the squaring of a very difficult circle. I therefore thank President Putin and President Erdoğan for their personal engagement. We had hoped that they would hold that meeting, and that meeting took place and produced a very important outcome.

I also believe that the strong international engagement on the dangers of a full-scale offensive in Idlib has been important. I thank everyone here because I know they have strongly raised that issue, together with my colleagues and friend Mark Lowcock. I commend members of Syrian civil society for raising their voice. There are 3 million of them. They have been raising their voices. In fact, just yesterday, for instance, I received a letter signed by more than 13,000 women from Idlib, calling for protection and security for their families and reminding us that they are civilians. We therefore hope that this agreement will be expeditiously implemented in full respect for international humanitarian law; with sustained humanitarian access; with respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria; and with continued preference for dialogue — such as yesterday's — over escalation in addressing a complex situation.

In that context, let met also note that, just as we are seeing crisis in Idlib averted, which is very good news, we are seeing worrying military activities elsewhere. Overnight, a Russian military aircraft was downed, killing 15 servicemen. The Russian Ministry of Defence has stated that the plane was accidentally downed by Syrian Government anti-aircraft fire, which was responding to Israeli fighter jets carrying out attacks just off the coast. The Government of Syria has stated that Israelli jets struck a Government facility near Latakia. Russia has blamed Israel for this. Israel has stated that Israeli jets were targeting weapons shipments headed for Lebanon that threatened Israeli security, and has blamed the Syrian Government for the incident. We call upon all parties to refrain from military actions that would only exacerbate an already complex situation, especially now that we are receiving

such positive news regarding what could have been a dramatic military escalation.

But for now, we are pleased that there is de-escalation in one major area: Idlib. And now that we have this deal, there is no reason not to move forward expeditiously with the political process. Let me turn to that process and take stock of where we stand.

Syrians look to the United Nations to facilitate a political process that can help them exit this war and enter into a better future — a future that they determine, independently and democratically. That will require a real dialogue and genuine negotiation — a process that is credible and inclusive. My guide is and will always be resolution 2254 (2015), which mandates the United Nations to facilitate the political process. Together with my team, I have always looked for creative ways to advance resolution 2254 (2015) in light of the many political and military developments taking place all the time — a rollercoaster — but always with a view to ensuring that the political process is credible and addresses the real issues that divide Syrians. That brings me to the constitutional committee.

The Secretary-General dispatched me to the Syrian Congress of National Dialogue in Sochi seven and a half months ago. It was a carefully considered decision, made after special consultations in Vienna with the Syrian parties and with the Russian Federation — and not just by me, but involving the Secretary-General himself, too. Based on those consultations, the United Nations had reason to believe that Sochi would contribute to accelerating the Geneva process. Its outcome was to be brought back to Geneva as a core component of the wider political process, and the final terms of a constitutional committee were to be facilitated by the United Nations in Geneva.

True to this spirit, since the Sochi Congress I have worked carefully to facilitate the establishment of a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led, United Nations-facilitated constitutional committee. I have consulted particularly closely with Iran, Russia and Turkey, given what is logically their particular interest — given that they were in Sochi — and responsibility to help make the Sochi outcomes meaningful. Of course, I have also consulted widely, including with the members of the so-called small group and others, too. And I have been continuously available and listening to Syrians — the Government, all parts of the opposition and many others too, inside and outside Syria.

In these consultations, a formula on participation gained acceptance. One-third of delegates would be the Government delegation; one-third would be a broadly represented opposition delegation; and a middle third would be, as the Sochi final statement clearly says: "Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women". It became clear that each third could comprise 50 members, and from each 50, 15 could be identified to play a particular role as regards drafting a constitutional reform. This, when combined with clear rules of procedure, would be a package to launch a credible and inclusive process for drafting a constitutional reform.

Based on this formula, three lists have emerged: the list of the Government delegation, with Russia and Iran's support; the list of a broadly represented opposition delegation, with Turkey's support and that of other States as well; and, crucially, a middle third list that, consistent with resolution 2254 (2015) and Sochi, is clearly my duty and responsibility to facilitate and then to finalize. In our modest opinion, the middle third list currently on the table meets the criteria outlined in the Sochi statement. I also ensured that it was something that the United Nations could support in terms of credibility and international legitimacy.

This meant selecting experts with critical technical expertise — we are talking about constitutions — and experience in constitution-drafting. It meant including Syrians from different ethnic, religious and geographical backgrounds; those from both inside and outside of Syria; and those who are known to be bridge-builders. It also meant ensuring that a minimum of 30 per cent across the entire 150 experts were women. One overarching consideration is the need for a balance in the middle third. No particular leaning should totally dominate; this will be a core component of the credibility of the committee.

In addition, after having consulted the Astana guarantors, I offered suggestions and options on the mandate, chairing, steering and decision-making — we have a lot of training and experience in that at the United Nations. These were designed to offer a minimum set of procedural points that would allow the Syrians to meet productively and progress in a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated process.

At the start of this month, I said we were getting closer to a moment of truth. All opportunities had been offered to canvass all issues thoroughly, including via

teams from my Office who visited Moscow, Ankara, Tehran and other capitals. I convened the Astana trio on 10 and 11 September in Geneva in an effort to move ahead. At that meeting, some issues became clear. For instance, the Government list is not contested, nor is the opposition list. This is important, but I have to admit that my team and I were disappointed that the middle third list — the list for which I have a particular responsibility — was significantly questioned. Approaches were suggested that I found to be inconsistent with the credibility and legitimacy needed for a United Nations-facilitated process. Meanwhile, while issues such as chairing and voting were canvassed, a lot was left unresolved regarding rules of procedure.

The Astana guarantors proposed that we continue technical talks on the middle third list before another meeting in Geneva in October. While I really have no problem with such technical meetings, let me be clear. The middle third list needs be balanced and credible to Syrians from all sides and to the international community. As per resolution 2254 (2015) and the Sochi final statement, it is the United Nations and the Geneva process that facilitate and finalize the way forward. Moreover, there is an urgency to move forward and move ahead. We cannot afford to keep constantly consulting each other.

This was — and is — my message to the Astana trio. I gave the exact same message when I met the members of the so-called small group, namely, Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. On 14 September in Geneva, I told them where we were in the process and welcomed their support. I made it clear to them, just I had to the Astana trio, that they should not seek to intervene in issues that are basically for the United Nations to facilitate — neither the lists, the rules of procedure nor the substance of the process — beyond what is in resolution 2254 (2015) and the 12 principles developed in the Geneva process and endorsed in Sochi.

It is too easy to say, "we will keep consulting". If we are not careful, this will become an end in itself. What Syrians want to know is when a credible process will start. As far as I am concerned, all the pieces are in place for that to happen; we could start in one week. If everyone supports the United Nations-led process and recognizes the need for it to be balanced and credible with sensible rules of procedure, we can move ahead very fast. Indeed, I believe that the time is approaching for me to indicate a fixed date by which the Sochi final statement is given effect by launching the constitutional committee.

This next month will therefore be critical. I am ready to engage everyone. In addition to the international players, I of course look forward to engaging the Syrian parties, starting with the Syrian Government. Their active involvement is obviously crucial if a constitutional committee is to proceed. I will also need to engage with the opposition and a wide range of Syrian voices. Above all, I want to move beyond the current preparations and see a genuinely Syrian-led, Syrian-owned constitutional committee up and running for the good of Syria and Syrians as a core component of a credible political process. This is what we have. The political process has been reduced to one very important thing, which is the constitutional committee, along with a safe and neutral environment and elections. These are very important and sufficient to make a difference.

Let us not underestimate the importance of this. There is a need to see Syrians start to talk to each other, which can take place within the constitutional committee. There is a need to find steps that can build confidence and that can, in time, create a safe, calm and neutral environment. At a time when there is an effort to focus on refugees and rehabilitation, let us not forget that without a meaningful and irreversible political process and without real steps on the ground, the confidence required may not develop.

I cannot fail to remind the Council here of the need for urgent, concrete actions on the release of detainees and abductees, the hand-over of bodies and the identification of missing persons, all of which are crucial issues that affect thousands of Syrians. Let us also remember that we must ultimately prepare for United Nations-supervised presidential and parliamentary elections, with all Syrians inside and outside Syria participating, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015).

Last week, I was honoured — like many of my colleagues — to attend Kofi Annan's funeral. As the first United Nations Special Envoy on the Syrian conflict, he emphasized some fundamental points: a political, not military solution — this is what we see in Idlib, as it moves in this direction — with one United Nations-led process of mediation, based on inclusion and consent and backed by a united Security Council.

He offered the first way out — the six-point plan and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) — but could not carry the effort forward when the Council was not united. This was a bitter price that had to be paid; we all know what happened. Sadly, it was a greatly missed opportunity, as Kofi Annan reminded me.

Much has changed since then, but we all agree that there is no military solution in Idlib or anywhere else. We need an inclusive political process and the United Nations is here to facilitate that process, starting with a constitutional committee getting to work. However, it must be credible, because only thus can the United Nations invest it with the legitimacy it needs. I ask all concerned to give the United Nations facilitation in the coming weeks — by that I mean in October — their full support.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: As the Council is aware, I was in Damascus three weeks ago for talks with the Government. We had constructive discussions on a range of issues. Across much of the country, the situation is now calmer than it was when I last visited in January.

However, humanitarian needs remain substantial and the Government expressed concern to me about the underfunding of the United Nations humanitarian response plan this year. I said that, in my judgment, addressing that would require improvement in needs assessment and access for humanitarian agencies, including my own Office, to assure both current and potential donors that help is genuinely targeted, in a neutral and impartial way, at the people in greatest need and, indeed, that such help reaches those same people.

Since the visit, of course, we have been totally focused on the danger that the looming Idlib catastrophe may totally upend our humanitarian agenda. As Mr. De Mistura has said, we welcome yesterday's news from Sochi. I want to be clear with the Council about what was at stake.

From the Secretary-General down, we have consistently expressed alarm over the risks of a full-scale military offensive in north-west Syria. It was no exaggeration, merely a statement of fact, that such an onslaught would likely have presaged the worst humanitarian tragedy of the twenty-first century. Surveys of affected people undertaken last month showed that well over 2 million people could have been displaced in the event of a full-scale military operation. It would have meant further untold suffering of vulnerable and terrified people from overcrowded sites in which basic services have been stretched to breaking point for months. There simply is no way for humanitarian agencies to protect and meet the needs of millions of extremely vulnerable people, including, as Mr. De Mistura reminded us, 1 million children, in the midst of a massive military onslaught. We therefore welcome yesterday's agreement because, if sustained and implemented in full respect of international humanitarian law, it may avert the catastrophe we have been warning against.

To succeed, demilitarization requires the agreement of all parties. Short of such agreement, it is foreseeable that force would be used to demilitarize, and thus civilians would be exposed to the very harm we are trying to avoid. Whether from within or outside the proposed demilitarized area, should civilians deem it necessary to leave, they must be allowed to seek refuge elsewhere. In case of displacement, all possible measures must be taken so that affected civilians are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition, and that members of the same family are not separated.

It is also important that any screening to distinguish civilians from fighters be undertaken in accordance with international humanitarian law and clear standard operating procedures, while ensuring humane treatment and accounting for those who have been screened. Special protection and assistance measures should be in place for civilians, in particular women and children, who have been associated with, or are family members of, fighters. Regardless of location — whether within or outside the demilitarized zone — international humanitarian law obligations continue to apply. Warring parties cannot deliberately or carelessly disregard the distinction between civilians and combatants, or between civilian infrastructure and military objectives.

The United Nations, along with other humanitarian organizations, continues to implement a major humanitarian assistance programme from across the border in Turkey, as mandated by Council resolutions. On average, we are reaching 2 million people each month in north-west Syria. This week alone, food for more than 260,000 people is being sent across the border,

as are non-food items and tents for more than 60,000 people — most of it through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing into Idlib. Aid is also being prepositioned to ensure that those in need can continue to receive support in the face of further military escalation. Food rations for one week for more than 350,000 people and non-food items for 400,000 people have already been prepositioned in Idlib. Supplies have also been prepositioned in Homs, Aleppo and Latakia governorates, including food assistance for up to 1 million people and shelter kits and non-food items for up to 300,000 people. Hardly any of that would have been possible had the Council not renewed the provisions of resolution 2165 (2014) when it adopted resolution 2393 (2017), in December 2017. The resolution made a real difference, and millions of people depend on the activities it mandates.

The humanitarian situation in other parts of the country remains difficult. At Rukban, on the Syria-Jordan border, the United Nations, in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, remains ready to provide humanitarian assistance through an inter-agency convoy. What we need is official approval from the Government of Syria for the convoy to proceed and for the teams to accompany the convoy to deliver life-saving supplies and carry out needs assessment and distribution monitoring. We also need deconfliction and guarantees of safe passage from the Government of Syria, the Russian Federation, international coalition forces and the Government of Jordan. And we need written guarantees of safe passage by all non-State armed groups controlling the camp and present along the route.

Further to the north, some 153,000 people are now estimated to have returned to Raqqa city since October 2017, although conditions remain unconducive for returns because of high levels of destruction and explosive hazard contamination. Efforts have been made to scale up the mine action response since earlier this year, including mine risk education activities and training. Humanitarian mine action organizations have also been carrying out mine removal operations in Raqqa city since June, focusing on key infrastructure, with a coordination mechanism available to include sites prioritized by the humanitarian community. However, much more needs to be done before the city is safe and conducive for returns.

In Deir ez-Zor, attention appears to have turned now to the last remaining enclave of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Syria, along the east bank of the Euphrates river in the southern parts of the governorate. That includes the towns of Hajin, Al-Soussa, Al-Sha'afa and Al-Baghouz. There are significant concerns for the safety and security of civilians living in those areas, with more than 20,000 people estimated to be displaced and reports of leaflets being dropped to warn civilians to leave before the start of the offensive. I call on parties once again to avoid civilian loss by respecting their international humanitarian law obligations of distinction, proportionality and precaution, and to allow civilians who wish to leave to move safely to other areas.

In the south-west of the country, most of the up to 325,000 people estimated to have been displaced in the area since late June are now reported to have returned to their areas of origin. But thousands still remained displaced and high levels of humanitarian need persist, including among returnees. The United Nations has continued to provide humanitarian aid in the area, with the agreement of the Government and in partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other humanitarian organizations, with efforts ongoing to ensure more sustained access across the area. That is urgently needed to address gaps issuing from the suspension of cross-border activities from Jordan in late June.

Let me finish with a final word on Idlib. What do we think the 3 million civilians, including those 1 million children, confined to Idlib make of yesterday's agreement? Well, they have a simple question: Is this merely a stay of execution or is it the beginning of a reprieve, the first tiny glint of light at the very end of the darkest tunnel?

The President: I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the Secretary of State's Special Representative for Syria Engagement, and at the invitation of Ambassador Haley. I thank her for her leadership to support the people of Syria and her invitation to be present here today.

I thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their briefings.

Before I continue, I would like to express sorrow to our Security Council partner Russia for the tragic loss of life when the Russian plane was downed yesterday. The unfortunate incident reminds us of the need to find

a permanent, peaceful and political resolution to the conflict, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

For 3 million Syrians, Idlib is their last hope for refugee from the Al-Assad regime's reign of terror, as we just heard from the Under-Secretary-General. Those people know Al-Assad's brutality all too well. That is because many of them, 1.4 million of them to be exact, already fled their homes before.

One of those people is a 24-year-old woman named Hiba.

Hiba and her family left the town of eastern Ghouta in March. At that time, the Secretary-General described the assault on eastern Ghouta as "hell on Earth". Hiba and her family were forced to flee to Idlib, hoping to find a place where they would not have to fear for their lives. But now Hiba is on the front line once again. As she told a reporter,

> "We saw enough bombing in eastern Ghouta. I cried so much when I heard the warplanes again. There is nowhere to take shelter."

It is for Hiba, for the 3 million civilians struggling alongside her in Idlib and for all her fellow citizens across Syria and in the diaspora that we need to see not just another stop-gap arrangement but a lasting ceasefire that paves the way for a credible political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process.

As President Trump has stated, Bashar Al-Assad of Syria must not recklessly attack Idlib. There is no military solution to this conflict. Russia wants the world to believe that after a military campaign everything will go back to the way it used to be. That is why they ask for the three Rs: recognition of the regime, reconstruction money and pushing Syria's neighbours to send refugees home before it is safe to do so, trying to sweep the past seven years of violence under the rug. Let us be serious. Al-Assad and the henchmen who unleashed these atrocities will never be welcome in the world of civilized nations. They will get no help to rebuild, certainly not from us. I cannot imagine that any other Government would want to explain to its people why it would send aid to the barbaric Al-Assad regime.

There will not be stability in Syria as long as Iran and its proxy forces remain. Those groups are responsible for some of the most egregious violence in this war. They have directed the regime's starve-and-surrender campaign. They are now on Israel's doorstep. That is unacceptable. Iran cannot dictate the future for the Syrian people. If Russia is interested in bringing peace to Syria, it should make sure that Iran and its militias leave Syria once and for all. The risk of a broader conflict will leave with them.

Iran is responsible for creating the Syria we see today: a broken and violent country. The Syrian people know full well who did this to them. No one will forget. We must prevent the people of Syria from facing yet another catastrophe at the hands of the Al-Assad regime, and the only way forward is a lasting ceasefire, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015).

Yesterday, as we just heard, Russia and Turkey agreed to stabilize the situation in Idlib. We call on all parties to commit to a lasting ceasefire and to take immediate steps to advance the Geneva peace process further. Again, the only way forward is a genuine and inclusive political solution.

Last week, I and others met with Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to determine how we advance the Geneva political process. That has to be our focus. We need talks that stick to the road map for a new constitution and elections in line with resolution 2254 (2015). The United States is fully committed to that effort, which is why I am here today to support Ambassador Haley and her team here in New York.

In our view, Special Envoy De Mistura should therefore immediately move forward as he has laid out, with the convening of a constitutional committee in keeping with his mandate. We have been discussing such a committee since January. We understand that Russia, back at the beginning, told us that it was fully on board and promised that the committee would fully support the United Nations Geneva process. As Mr. De Mistura said, it is urgent to move forward now. The United Nations should therefore set a date for the first meeting of the committee and move forward with creating such a new constitution. We should hear back from the United Nations on its progress by 31 October. I urge other Security Council partners to support such an approach.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I also want to express my condolences to Russia for the recent loss of life, which

adds to the list of immeasurable losses of life in Syria and highlights the need for an urgent political solution.

I speak on behalf of Sweden and Kuwait.

I would first like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing on the humanitarian situation and the humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations in very difficult circumstances. We reiterate our call for safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all in need across Syria, including to areas that have recently changed control. The reports of the Secretary-General continue to be clear that all methods of delivery, including cross-border aid, are essential to the effective provision of humanitarian assistance and to ensuring a needs-based response. We also reiterate our calls on all donors to contribute generously to the underfunded Syria appeals.

We would like to focus our remarks yet again on Idlib, and thank Staffan De Mistura and Mr. Lowcock for keeping us up to date on the different aspects of the extremely serious situation there, and of the intensive work of the United Nations to prevent what we have been warned could be the biggest humanitarian catastrophe of this century.

We received reports that there were days without airstrikes last week, which shows that, when there is political will, a cessation of hostilities can be achieved. We are encouraged by the statements from the meeting in Sochi yesterday, and we hope that a cessation of hostilities in Idlib will now ensue and be respected by all and that dialogue rather than military escalation will prevail. That is also required in order to succeed with efforts to separate terrorist groups as designated by the Security Council from armed opposition groups. We would appreciate receiving more information on the agreement made in Sochi today, including on the implementation of a demilitarized zone to be established by 15 October and reassurances of an immediate cessation of hostilities. We also welcome Special Envoy De Mistura's work in that regard, and we encourage coordination between ongoing efforts where relevant.

Counter-terrorism measures in no way relieve the parties of their very clear obligations under international law, which are applicable throughout Idlib and Syria. The Secretary-General last week called on the Astana guarantors

> "to find a way to isolate terrorist groups and create a situation in which civilians will not be the price paid to solve the problem of Idlib".

That is as true for Idlib as it is true across Syria.

Over the past few weeks, in meeting after meeting, Sweden and Kuwait, together with the vast majority of Security Council members, have consistently called on the Astana guarantors to implement their own de-escalation agreement in Idlib. We will continue that preventative diplomacy, and we repeat our calls today that Syria and its allies must refrain from escalating violence in Idlib, ensure humanitarian access and full freedom of movement for all persons and abide by all their obligations under international law. Civilians and civilian objects must be protected, and all parties are obliged to apply the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. All those obligations apply across Idlib and in all of Syria, inside and outside any demilitarized zone. The very clear demands on the parties to the conflict in resolution 2401 (2018) likewise remain in place.

We also express our grave concern over new reports of attacks on medical facilities despite deconfliction, for example, the case of the 6 September bombing of the medical facility in Kafar Zita. Such attacks may amount to war crimes. There can be no impunity for violations and abuses of international law, and we reaffirm our strong support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism and the Commission of Inquiry in that regard. We also support the call by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock to all parties to abide by deconfliction protocols.

We also appreciate the update by Special Envoy De Mistura on the United Nations-led political process and his tireless efforts in that regard. We agree with him on how resolution 2254 (2015) is intrinsically linked to how to solve the situation in Idlib. Incentives are needed for the day after separation, both for armed groups and for the civilian population. Such incentives can come only from a genuine diplomatic effort on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

It is therefore urgent to make progress on the political process in parallel. We lend our full support to the United Nations mandate to establish the constitutional committee and prerogative to ensure its credibility and international legitimacy. Women's full and effective participation in the work of the committee must be ensured. We call on all involved to respect the

independent middle list created by the United Nations, and we encourage the Special Envoy to convene the committee as soon as possible, as he indicated.

Let us all be clear: a full-scale military operation in Idlib would risk any remaining hope for a sustainable and peaceful settlement in Syria. Only once a credible political transition is firmly under way, and when conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons are in place, will the international donor community be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria.

The responsibility — and ability — to avoid a catastrophe and allow time for dialogue still lies with Syria and the Astana guarantors. As co-penholders for the Syria humanitarian file, Kuwait and Sweden will continue to ensure that the Council follows developments in Idlib very closely. We continue to be actively exploring all options for the Security Council. We stand ready to work with all Council members and the relevant actors on the best way forward. Enough blood has been shed. All efforts should now be political and diplomatic.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to join the other speakers in expressing my deepest condolences to the Russian Federation with respect to the event just mentioned.

I thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Mark Lowcock for their exemplary commitment and their briefings, which not only make clear the gravity of the current situation but also illustrate the potential that exists today for a way out of this crisis.

Syria is today at a crossroads: it can either spiral further into military escalation in Idlib, which would begin one of the darkest chapters of the Syrian tragedy, or it could instead take the path of genuine political engagement towards resolving the conflict. Both scenarios, the darkest and the most encouraging, are possible at this point. The decision largely depends upon the Security Council's ability to unite around peace — on option that is today, despite the immense the immense challenges, within our reach.

Syria is once again on a precipice, with an offensive threatening the Idlib area for the past several weeks, where more than 3 million people are now located. Locations there have already been subjected to shelling, tens of thousands of civilians have fled the indiscriminate strikes and yet worse still could be to come. Several hospitals have been the targets of attack. We cannot reiterate it too much: attacks against health personnel and hospitals constitute war crimes and their perpetrators will have to answer for their actions. The fight against terrorism is in no circumstance an adequate argument to justify such a disaster. Indiscriminate attacks represent not only a humanitarian outrage but also acts of strategic folly, serving only to fuel the terrorism they purport to fight. Syria has therefore become the pre-eminent incubator of terrorism. An offensive in Idlib would have the same effect and, furthermore, contribute to dispersing the jihadist fighters there across the region, potentially to Europe and beyond.

France has deployed tireless efforts in all forums, on all fronts, in seeking with its partners ways to avert disaster. A four-party meeting was held last Friday among the diplomatic Councillors of Turkey, Russia, Germany and France, with a view to finding common ground between the small group and the Astana group. In our view, that is an unavoidable path. Turkey has made significant efforts to contribute to concrete solutions. While we note the agreement announced yesterday by Presidents Erdoğan and Putin regarding the establishment of a demilitarized zone in the Idlib area, we call on Turkey and Russia to specify the parameters, such as the fate and movements of terrorist groups designated by the Security Council.

In that context, when we want to believe that diplomacy is finally regaining ground, we must persevere in our joint efforts to persuade all parties to the conflict that there are alternatives to escalation and that the path of dialogue is the only way to deliver on a lasting solution to the situation in Idlib.

The protection of civilians must be an absolute priority for all stakeholders. It is incumbent upon all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular pursuant to the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. We must also do everything possible to protect humanitarian and medical facilities and personnel and to ensure safe, full and unimpeded humanitarian access to populations in need. I should like to recall the unique and crucial nature of cross-border humanitarian assistance, which in August alone provided vital daily assistance to nearly 750,000 individuals in the north-west.

We continue to support Turkey's efforts to find a negotiated solution in Idlib. We commend its

commitment, like that of the United Nations, which is making a real difference. It is the very future of Syria that is at stake. How is it possible to simultaneously hope for the return of refugees and prepare for an offensive that could displace hundreds of thousands of people? How is it possible to generate the necessary trust for a credible political process at a time when the population of Idlib continues to be threatened by a brutal military campaign? How can we call for the rebuilding of Syria at the same time as preparing to destroy Idlib and there exists no credible and irreversible political process? The reality is that there can be no military solution in Syria. An offensive in Idlib would further destroy hope for peace in Syria. I repeat it once again: we will tolerate no further use of chemical weapons in Syria, and we stand ready to respond.

Avoiding an escalation in Idlib is all the more necessary given that a credible negotiated political solution acceptable to all is within our grasp. That is my firm belief. This option was generated by United Nations mediation. The discussions held last week in Geneva should lead to the prompt establishment of the constitutional committee, the first component of a political process endorsed by the international community, including the Security Council, through resolution 2254 (2015). The small group, which met with the Special Envoy on Friday, expressed its full support for those efforts. However, the Asana guarantors have expressed reservations regarding the composition of the constitutional committee established by Special Envoy, despite the mandate entrusted to him by the Sochi final statement of 31 January.

France firmly believes that the time has come to move forward with the setting up of the constitutional committee by Mr. De Mistura as soon as possible. That is the call I wish to issue today on behalf of France, echoing, and supporting, the message Mr. Mistura has just delivered to us. An imminent date is needed for that work to begin. I recall that participants in the Sochi congress agreed that the Special Envoy would be responsible for the committee's composition under the Geneva process. Those commitments must be upheld. The Special Envoy must be in a position to update us on his progress at the next Council meeting on this matter, and the constitutional committee should finally be able to meet as soon as possible. In our view, that is key to building real political momentum. We all are aware that the road ahead is long and difficult; that is the very reason for our call: not one minute do we have to waste.

A political solution does not begin and end with the drafting of a new constitution; detailed discussions must now begin on its many other elements, such as modalities for the adoption of a new constitutional text; the holding of free and transparent elections in which all Syrians, including refugees and displaced persons, can vote; and, more broadly, the creation of a safe and neutral environment, underpinned by confidence-building measures, which is integral for granting the necessary credibility to the entire process.

Our road map has been clearly laid out: a strong commitment to a cessation of hostilities in Idlib; the continuation of the political process, with collective support for the launch of the constitutional committee's work as the first step; and the unity of the Council around a constructive political agenda with a view to a peaceful and agreed upon resolution to the conflict. It is France's unambiguous position that the rebuilding of Syria can be envisioned only on that basis, once an irreversible, credible and inclusive political transition has begun. Let us be clear: without a guarantee that such a transition is under way, no Syrians will believe that their country has changed and the vast majority of them will refuse to return home, dooming any hope of lasting peace in Syria.

In conclusion, I would like to stress our belief that the Security Council has a special responsibility to break the cycle of tragedy in Syria and to generate genuine political momentum. On behalf of France, I call on the Council to rally around that shared political goal by supporting the Geneva process, the Special Envoy and an inclusive political settlement.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We express our heartfelt condolences to Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia for the loss of life of Russian servicemen yesterday. We also extend those condolences to his Government and the families of the victims.

We must be aware that the situation in Idlib, and in Syria in general, requires strong diplomatic capacity at the highest level to stop the massacre and objectively manage the flow of displaced persons. That is why, despite the very confrontational positions expressed at the Tehran summit, the Government of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the signing of the memorandum on the stabilization of the Idlib de-escalation zone, which was agreed yesterday in Sochi by President Putin and President Erdoğan. That memorandum is

aimed at rejecting a large-scale military offensive, which we have been anticipating since the beginning of September owing to the intensification of air and land attacks, which have led to dozens of deaths, injuries and displacements, as well as the destruction of civilian infrastructure. As the signatories pointed out, that Russian-Turkish agreement seeks to create a demilitarized zone in Idlib patrolled by soldiers of both countries by 15 October and should make it possible to separate the Government forces from the opposition forces, to withdraw heavy weapons starting on 10 October and to re-establish road transport between Aleppo and the towns of Latakia and Hama before the end of 2018. All that means that the Russian-Turkish talks must prevent the Syrian army from carrying out a major military offensive, which would lead to the loss of many civilian lives in Idlib.

We congratulate the Governments of the Russian Federation and Turkey for that noble diplomatic effort, and the Syrian Government for having supported that agreement and stated that it is prepared to implement its provisions.

That decision, which should be aimed at strengthening the ceasefire, improving the humanitarian situation and seeking a long-term political solution to the conflict, is perfectly in line with the mandate and work of the international mediator for Syria, Special Envoy De Mistura. We would like to thank him for his tireless work, which hled to the Sochi agreement. My Government hopes that the meetings held by Mr. De Mistura with representatives of 10 countries of the International Syria Contact Group on 10, 11 and 14 September in Geneva will finally lead to the creation of an intra-Syrian constitutional committee and that the guarantors of Astana will not present any impediment to the constitutional proposal put forward by Mr. De Mistura. That proposal is essential for the holding of elections in the post-war period with a view to legitimizing a political process in which all the political actors of the country must participate.

The fact that the Syrian conflict will not end with this battle justifies the need to prioritize a political solution in Idlib. The Islamic State continues to maintain a small redoubt on the border with Iraq, and a large part of the country's territory remains beyond the Government's reach, especially in the north and east, areas which are in the hands of Kurdish militia. Moreover, armed groups that manage to escape Idlib could still find refuge north of Aleppo. Therefore, as we have said before, civilians must not be made to suffer from a scorched earth policy.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, as has been stressed, 2 million people in Idlib are in a vulnerable situation and require humanitarian assistance. In that context, a major attack could be more lethal and destructive than any other that has been launched during this conflict, which has already claimed the lives of more than 500,000 people since 2011.

Despite that difficult operational environment, my delegation is pleased that the United Nations and its partners are continuing to deliver regular humanitarian assistance to Idlib from across the border in Turkey. Furthermore, under such challenging circumstances, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners must not lose sight of the need for cross-border assistance to be prioritized so that humanitarian assistance can be delivered efficiently and effectively.

I would like to conclude by reiterating once again the need for all parties to the conflict to exercise restraint and respect their obligations under human rights law and humanitarian law to safeguard civilian lives and protect civilian infrastructure, as well as United Nations personnel and humanitarian actors, in accordance with resolution 2139 (2014).

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I wish to extend our sincerest condolences to our colleagues and friends of the Russian delegation with regard to the tragedy of the downing of the aircraft that had military personnel on board. We are deeply troubled by that tragedy, and we extend our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of the dead, as well as the colleagues of those who died.

(*spoke in English*)

We thank Special Envoy De Mistura and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for their comprehensive and very informative briefings. It is gratifying to learn that, despite the problems with regard to Idlib, we have made substantial progress in the political process towards resolving the conflict.

Kazakhstan is pleased to note that the work carried out by the guarantors is undoubtedly aimed at preventing escalation in Idlib, because no one wants war. In that regard, Kazakhstan welcomes the memorandum signed on 17 September in Sochi by the Defence Ministries of Russia and Turkey on the stabilization of the situation in the de-escalation zone of Idlib in Syria. We

support the creation of a demilitarized buffer zone in Syria's Idlib province to separate Government forces from rebel fighters based there. We commend Turkey and Russia on the breakthrough decision to enforce the demilitarized zone by 15 October. Now we look forward to the implementation of the agreement by all parties engaged in the deal. We commend the Special Envoy's attempts to involve various States of the Middle East, the Gulf region and Europe in the process. We welcome his consultations on 14 September in Geneva with the delegations of the so-called small group to facilitate the broader dimension of our collective effort. Although that meeting did not end in tangible results, such consultations should be continued, as they are a clear confirmation that the world community intends to find a peaceful way out of the Syrian crisis. Likewise, an innovative regional paradigm is needed to support both the Geneva and Astana processes in order to uphold the ceasefire and promote the peace process. We note with satisfaction the fact that the negotiations in Geneva agreed on the number of candidates for the constitutional committee. We support Mr. De Mistura's efforts to proceed with the launch of the work of that important body.

The situation in Syria is very difficult. Like the guarantors of the Astana process, we all need to make every effort to ensure that the civilian population does not suffer because of the struggle that must be continued against terrorist organizations. We also urge all sides to act with prudence with regard to the so-called threat of the use of chemical weapons, by either side so as to avert any further political or humanitarian crises.

We highly commend the visit of Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock to Damascus on 28 August to engage with the Government of Syria on how best to further scale up the collective humanitarian response. We call on the international community to provide additional financial support and the resources that are urgently needed to respond to a potential military escalation in the north-west of the country.

Kazakhstan is concerned about the safety and protection of civilians in Syria's rural Deir ez-Zor governorate, where fighting has displaced more than 20,000 people since July. As we know, recently 53 people were killed and 100 injured in air strikes on residential areas in the Abu Kamal district. Internally displaced people have settled in makeshift camps in the governorate and are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Nearly 200,000 displaced people have returned to Deir ez-Zor since November 2017. We commend the United Nations on its efforts to ensure safe access for humanitarian aid workers so as to reach people in need. We call on all sides not to block aid and to make every effort to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Lastly, analysing events in recent days, Astana assesses that developments in the situation in Syria have created the basis for a qualitative change for the better — the final elimination of terrorists on the territory of the country, the beginning of a real political process, the revival of economic activity and the return of refugees to their homeland.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): First of all, my delegation would also like to extend its sincere condolences to the Russian Federation following the incident that occurred yesterday in Syria.

My delegation welcomes today's briefing on the political process and the humanitarian situation in Syria under your presidency, Sir, and thanks Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their informative briefings on the latest developments in Syria.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, my delegation welcomes the multifaceted assistance that United Nations agencies, funds and programmes continue to provide to people in distress in the areas affected by armed clashes, despite ongoing hostilities. The plight of those people is all the more worrying as they are also exposed to risks caused by the presence of explosive remnants of war and landmines. In addition, several staff members of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations specialized in the provision of humanitarian aid also pay with their lives for their commitment to assisting people affected by the conflict. Reports to date reveal that 22 United Nations agency staff members have been killed, including 18 from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. As for non-governmental organizations, 74 Syrian and Palestinian Red Crescent staff and volunteers have made the ultimate sacrifice.

My delegation remains convinced that a possible offensive by the Syrian armed forces in Idlib will have unprecedented humanitarian consequences, which will cause another mass exodus, thereby adding to

the suffering of a population martyred by seven years of particularly deadly conflict. We are extremely concerned about the increasing risk of a humanitarian disaster in Idlib governorate, which hosts nearly 3 million people, including 1.4 million internally displaced persons. Those people have no choice but to take refuge in overcrowded camps, where basic services are struggling to meet their immense needs. Côte d'Ivoire therefore urges the parties to the conflict to show restraint and take the necessary measures to ensure safe, sustainable and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance in order to avoid another tragedy, such as that experienced in eastern Ghouta, Aleppo and Homs.

My country recalls that the warring parties cannot evade their obligations to protect civilians and civilian objects, in accordance with the relevant provisions of international law. We therefore call upon them to take all the measures necessary to spare schools, hospitals and medical personnel during military operations. My country also takes this opportunity to reiterate its commitment to the principle of accountability. To that end, my delegation urges all parties, including States, civil society and United Nations agencies, to cooperate fully with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

On the political front, my country welcomes the sustained efforts of Mr. De Mistura to reach a political solution, which is the only way out of the current impasse. In that regard, we welcome the meetings organized by the Special Envoy last week in Geneva among the guarantors of the Astana process to discuss the establishment of the constitutional committee and among the representatives of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan to discuss issues related to the political process and the establishment of the electoral committee. Côte d'Ivoire urges all parties to support the Special Envoy in his quest for a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict. Lastly, we call on the warring parties to opt for the path of dialogue, as stipulated in resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to begin by expressing our deepest condolences following the tragic death yesterday of Russian aircraft servicemen, as well as to extend our sympathy to their loved ones.

I thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings. China appreciates their efforts to promote the Syrian political process and alleviate the humanitarian situation in the country.

The international community has closely followed the situation in Idlib for quite some time. China welcomes the joint statement issued by the leaders of the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran on 7 September. We applaud the meeting held between Russian and Turkish leaders in Sochi on 17 September and the signing of the memorandum on the supervision of the de-escalation zone in Idlib. China supports all efforts to ease the situation and advance the Syrian political settlement process. Going forward, all parties with influence should seek to work together to activate it and ensure that the joint statement and memorandum are fully implemented in order to facilitate the ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities. That would in turn foster favourable external conditions for dialogue, peace talks and a political settlement to the situation in Syria. The international community should forge synergies in order to continue fighting terrorism, while building on the counter-terrorism gains made in Syria and preventing terrorist organizations from abducting and coercing civilians.

A political solution is the only way to lasting peace and stability in Syria. Last week Special Envoy De Mistura conducted in-depth consultations with the Syrian parties on the establishment of the constitutional committee. The international community should continue to support the United Nations as the main mediation channel, as well as the role played by the Geneva peace talks and the Astana process. It should also push the Syrian parties to effectively implement resolution 2254 (2015), in line with the principle of a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led process in search of a political solution that responds to the realities on the ground in Syria and accommodates the concerns of all parties through inclusive political dialogue. All parties are duty-bound to adhere to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and other recognized basic norms governing international relations and to fully respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.

China is deeply concerned about the developments in Syria and its humanitarian situation. Despite the myriad challenges, the Syrian people are repairing roads, restoring power and rebuilding hospitals, schools and other infrastructure. The number of refugees and displaced persons returning to their homes is steadily on the rise. Only through steady progress in rebuilding can we bring hope to the Syrian people and help secure long-term stability and peace in Syria.

The international community should actively support the reconstruction of Syria, including through intensified efforts to clear explosive remnants of war, so as to create conditions for the return of refugees and displaced persons. The Syrian parties should proceed by taking into account the future of the country and the well-being of the people, abide by relevant Council resolutions, resolve their differences through dialogue and consultations and alleviate the humanitarian situation without delay.

The United Nations and the international community should strengthen communication and coordination with the Syrian Government in providing assistance to all areas in need in Syria. The humanitarian relief efforts in Syria should adhere to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and apoliticality.

In recent years, China has provided substantial assistance to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria and neighbouring countries affected by the crisis. In August, the Red Cross Society of China provided Syria with mobile medical units, including two medical buses and two ambulances. It also handed over to to the host a prosthetic rehabilitation centre for Syrian children, built with the assistance of China. China will continue to provide assistance to Syria and its neighbours to the best of our ability.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank both briefers for their comprehens, yet again very worrying, updates. Like many others around the table, we share a sense of urgency while talking about the current developments in Syria, where the conflict is far from its end. Allow me also to join others in expressing our sincere condolences to the Russian Mission.

Let me today focus on two aspects of the conflict — the internal and the external.

First, while talking about the internal dimension of the conflict, we cannot acknowledge that things are normalizing. Even though last Sunday — for the first time since 2011 — local elections were held, we have to underline that not everyone could participate in them. We have to keep in mind the lack of participation by internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Syrian refugees. Therefore, in our opinion, those elections might not fully reflect the reality of Syria today.

As there is no military solution to the conflict, we have always underlined that we should aim at reaching an intra-Syrian framework for a political agreement on a transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015). It is for the Syrians themselves to negotiate, and that is why we desperately need to revive the United Nations political process in Geneva. Only a real, tangible political process, which would ensure true representation of the Syrian people, would provide the setting of a timetable and procedures for the drafting of a constitution and conducting United Nations-supervised free and fair elections.

In that context, let me express our strong support for the Syrian-led inclusive constitutional committee under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva. It should be implemented as a priority now. It requires the full and constructive engagement of all parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian authorities, to participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions.

It is also important to note that a cessation of hostilities may also give the peace talks under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva the opportunity to gain momentum, so that a political solution might be finally reached. For that reason, we call upon all parties to fulfil their commitments to the existing ceasefire agreements.

Secondly, with regard to the external dimension of the crisis, we need to discuss the political and humanitarian situation in Syria today, although the military offensive in Syria continues. As a consequence, human suffering is growing. Any action, taken by anyone — but especially by the Astana guarantors — even against terrorists, cannot justify the attacks on innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure, including health facilities. All parties to the conflict are obliged under international humanitarian law not to attack civilians and civilian infrastructure and to take all possible measures to protect civilians. There is a special role for Russia, Turkey and Iran in that regard.

We are extremely worried about the escalation of hostilities in the Idlib governorate. That region is

one of the de-escalation zones in Syria, which was established and is overseen by the guarantors of the Astana process with an aim to ensure the ceasefire and humanitarian access.

We welcome the agreement reached between Russia and Turkey in Sochi yesterday, which is thought to have averted an all-out offensive by the Government forces to retake the last remaining opposition stronghold in Idlib. Considering it as a move in the right direction towards avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe, we urge all parties to the conflict to ensure the full implementation of the agreement.

We are deeply concerned about the severe situation of the most vulnerable victims of the conflict — especially children, women and members of religious minorities, as well as IDPs. Those groups currently constitute half of the population of Idlib. If not protected, we are risking a humanitarian catastrophe that might also include a serious risk of sexual violence. We call upon all to alleviate the suffering of civilians by granting them free and safe access to humanitarian assistance, including voluntary medical evacuation, which should strictly be overseen by the United Nations and the implementing partners, based only on medical needs, in order to ensure the voluntary character of the process.

In conclusion, let me stress the necessity of maintaining unity as well as the responsibility in the Security Council on the question of the full implementation of the humanitarian resolution (resolution 2401 (2018)) across Syria. All parties to the conflict should exercise restraint and prioritize the protection of civilians. We call on all stakeholders with influence on the ground, especially Russia, Turkey and Iran, to take the necessary steps to ensure that the fighting stops and the Syrian people are protected.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we express our condolences to Russia for those who lost their lives yesterday in Syria.

We appreciate the convening of this meeting, and we are grateful to Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Lowcock for their briefings and work. We acknowledge and support their efforts to achieve a political solution to the conflict in Syria and to protect the civilian population.

Peru notes with regret and deep concern the continuation of the conflict and the grave humanitarian situation. We regret the suffering and the high level of vulnerability of millions of people, as well as the evident disdain of the parties to the conflict for international law and international humanitarian law. As previously pointed out, it is essential to prevent Idlib from becoming a new site of humanitarian tragedy or a major factor of instability.

Peru strongly condemns terrorism and considers it necessary that the remaining terrorist groups in Idlib and in other areas of Syria be held accountable. We also recognize the need to safeguard the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. However, in no way should that be interpreted as justification for putting the lives of millions of people at risk. On the contrary, the situation leads us to emphasize that there is no military solution to the conflict. In that regard, we would like to welcome the announcement of the Presidents of the Russian Federation and Turkey concerning the establishment of a demilitarized zone, which indeed includes the distinguishing and the separation of terrorists from other rebel groups and the civilian population. We also wish to acknowledge the intense efforts that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General has been carrying out in that vein, in particular the recent meeting he convened in Geneva with the so-called small group.

We encourage all parties to maintain a constructive and committed spirit, with a view to protecting the civilian population throughout the Syrian territory, and to advance the political process based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/512, annex). With regard to the latter, we underscore the need to accelerate the implementation of an inclusive and representative constitutional committee, especially with respect to Syrian women. And we welcome the progress in that regard that the Special Envoy has made known to us.

We also highlight the need to accelerate the process of releasing prisoners, of identifying missing persons and of handing over human remains to relatives. Furthermore, we underscore the need to guarantee immediate, safe and unrestricted access to humanitarian assistance from the United Nations and other specialized agencies. That includes cross-border assistance, which in the current context is essential for the survival of millions of people.

Finally, we must not forget the need to address the situation of the millions of displaced persons and to consider that the achievement of sustainable peace in

Syria necessitates their ability to return to their homes, properties and businesses voluntarily, under safe conditions and in a dignified manner.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): Allow me, first of all, to join other colleagues in expressing our sincere condolences to the Russian Federation.

We thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for their briefings on the Syrian political and humanitarian track. We reiterate our support for the continued diplomatic endeavours of the Special Envoy to facilitate a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis. We also appreciate the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for continuing to provide aid to millions of Syrians under difficult circumstances.

We have been expressing our concern about the humanitarian consequences of a further military escalation in Idlib and its surrounding areas. As it has been mentioned repeatedly, there are close to 3 million people residing in that area; and 2.1 million are already in need of humanitarian assistance. In addition, 1.4 million are internally displaced. Therefore, a further military escalation would endanger millions of civilians and severely affect the ability of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to deliver aid, leading to further loss of lives as well as displacement. That is why the Secretary- General made an appeal last week to avoid a full-scale battle in Idlib, as it would unleash a humanitarian nightmare.

While we worry about the fate of civilians, we also understand that there are United Nations-listed terrorists who must be defeated with enhanced international cooperation and coordination. Therefore, as the Secretary-General underlined, it is vital to spare no effort to find solutions that protect civilians in Idlib. At such critical times, we believe it is imperative to do everything possible to demonstrate the primacy of diplomacy.

In that regard, we welcome that the meeting between the Presidents of Russia and Turkey held in Sochi resulted in an agreement to establish a demilitarized zone. While expressing our appreciation to both countries, we hope that their agreement will protect civilians and avoid the worst scenario, which both the Special Envoy and the Humanitarian Coordinator have been warning of repeatedly. We encourage the Astana guarantors, particularly Russia and Turkey, to continue to work together to find a sustainable solution to the situation. We also believe their efforts should be supported by all States that have influence over local actors in Syria.

As we continue to advocate for a durable solution to the Idlib situation, it is also absolutely imperative to support the humanitarian programmes of the United Nations and its partners. The humanitarian tragedy in Idlib and other parts of Syria continue to require safe, rapid and sustained humanitarian access. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/845) mentions, all methods of aid delivery are essential to the efficient and effective provision of humanitarian assistance and to ensuring a needs-based response. In that connection, we welcome the visit of the Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria on 28 August. We hope his meetings with the Syrian Government and other stakeholders will bring about tangible results that improve humanitarian access to enable the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to provide aid to all Syrians based on needs.

While we all have been rightly focusing on the urgent situation in Idlib, we all also agree that both the crisis in Idlib and the whole of Syria cannot be addressed without a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led comprehensive political process facilitated by the United Nations. Hence we support the continued efforts of the Special Envoy. We acknowledge the consultations he mentioned having last week on the constitutional committee with the Astana guarantors and the members of the small group. In that regard, we underscore that all Syrians parties and those States with influence should support the efforts of the Special Envoy to finalize the establishment of the constitutional committee, which is critical to relaunching the intra-Syrian political talks.

In conclusion, there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Only political solution, facilitated by the United Nations, can meet the legitimate aspirations of the people of Syria. As the Secretary-General reminded us in his latest report, the only goal of the United Nations efforts — which is to end the suffering of Syrians — should be shared by all of us. At this very critical time, the Council should extend its backing to the Special Envoy as he continues his tireless efforts to end the Syrian crisis through an inclusive political process based on resolution 2254 (2015).

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to thank both Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Special Envoy De Mistura for their respective briefings. Let me also express our thanks

to all those United Nations and other humanitarian aid workers who are providing life-saving aid to those most in need. We salute their selfless and brave work in dire circumstances.

I would also like to join others in offering our condolences to Russia and the families of those who lost their lives in the downing of a military plane. It adds to the long list of casualties that this conflict has caused and underscores the need for a political solution.

Despite the relative calm of the past few days, the situation in and around Idlib remains extremely tense. Everything needs to be done to prevent an all-out offensive. The agreement between Russia and Turkey on a demilitarized zone around Idlib seems a step in that direction.

I would like to focus on the following points: the need for further de-escalation in Idlib; the need to revive the political process and to form the constitutional committee; the need to deliver impartial humanitarian aid and the reasons why it is not the right time for reconstruction aid at this moment.

On the need for de-escalation in Idlib, the Kingdom of the Netherlands once again underlines that further escalation of violence in Idlib could lead to an international confrontation and a humanitarian catastrophe. Some of the 2.9 million civilians inside Idlib have already been on the move in the past few days.

Yesterday in Sochi, an agreement was reached on a 15- to 25-kilometre-wide demilitarized zone. Chances of a military confrontation between the regime and opposition groups have been reduced significantly. Still, some questions remain. What happens until the moment the deal comes into force, supposedly on 15 October? Can Russia and Turkey guarantee that civilians will not be forced to move from their homes? Will there be access for humanitarian aid delivery to people living in the demilitarized zone? We would appreciate clarification from Russia on those questions.

There is consensus in the Security Council on the need to counter terrorism of Council-designated terrorist groups. The protection of civilians should be at the core of every possible plan. We reiterate that combating terrorism is no excuse to attack without distinction, proportionality or precaution. We support efforts to separate terrorists from civilians, to prevent terrorists from using civilians as human shields. We call on all parties to ensure full respect for international humanitarian law, and to refrain from any attacks on basic services and hospitals. The Syrian army and the Russian air force have the coordinates of the hospitals. All attacks that have already taken place, as well as those that might still take place in the future, fall under their responsibility, and accountability needs to take place.

On the need to revive the political process and form the constitutional committee, we welcome the progress with regard to the establishment of the constitutional committee. It is not a goal in itself but is part of the broader political process based on resolution 2254 (2015). One can speak only of a credible political process when the constitutional committee itself is credible. That means there is a need for inclusiveness and representation of all Syrians. We reiterate that the Special Envoy must have the freedom to compile the so-called third list. It should not require negotiation with States. We repeat our support for the Special Envoy's commitment to have 30 per cent female representation in all parts of the constitutional com mittee.The United Nations should set a date for the first meeting of the constitutional committee and move ahead with creating a new constitution. We look forward to hearing back from the United Nations on its progress by 31 October.

On the need to deliver impartial humanitarian aid, unimpeded and unconditional access for principled humanitarian assistance — both cross-border and cross-line — remains an absolute necessity. The 2.9 million citizens in Idlib must be protected and their needs need to be met. We welcome the United Nations action plan. It is of the utmost importance that it now be quickly financed and operationalized. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is willing to do its part. It is essential that the United Nations remains operative and has free access to enable efficient humanitarian aid throughout Syria. We repeat our call to the Syrian authorities, Russia and Iran to immediately improve independent and free access for all humanitarian organizations.

The regime makes independent needs assessments, coordination and reporting by the United Nations impossible; however, those are conditions for needs-based financing. We repeat our scepticism about the concept of humanitarian corridors or other evacuations of civilians and moderate fighters from Idlib, as proposed by the regime and Russia. First, there must be clarity on the evacuation process, destinations, monitoring by the United Nations and guaranteed access to satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene,

health, safety and nutrition. Evacuations should always be voluntary and should never be used for political or demographic purposes.

Let me conclude by condemning the current call for reconstruction aid and the call for the return of refugees. There will be no reconstruction aid for Syria until there is a lasting political transition in Syria. It is also inconceivable that we start rebuilding when a massive attack still looms around Idlib. Syria currently is not ready for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. Contrary to what some want to make us believe, it is not the lack of reconstruction that keeps people from returning. Many Syrians cannot go back for fear of violence, persecution and imprisonment. Those Syrians fear security screenings and forced conscription and, last but not least, they have no homes to return to, due to the potential consequences of laws such as Law Number 10. It is clear that fundamental structural changes are needed in Syria's Administration. An inclusive political transition must be the starting point.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Welcome you back to New York, Mr. President. I thank our two briefers, the Special Envoy and the Under-Secretary-General. Let me also repeat the thanks of colleagues for everything their teams do on the ground to help the people of Syria, who need them more than ever. We are very conscious this is a very difficult job for them to do.

The conflict is seven and a half years old — it is longer than the Second World War. Over half a million people have died in Syria, millions have been displaced and chemical weapons have been used, including by the Syrian regime. I think we are running out of superlatives to describe the horrors of this conflict.

We meet every month on Syria in this Chamber, but this time does feel particularly important. The Turkish plan for Idlib, which its officials have discussed with the Russians, is the crux. It needs to be developed and implemented and, as other speakers have said, Russia in particular needs to uphold it. We look to Russia to do that because Russia is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, with particular responsibilities for international peace and security. Russian needs to exert its influence on the Syrian authorities, otherwise the crimes that are committed against the Syrian people are committed in Russia's name. We heard earlier about the voices of Idlib. There are 3 million voices in Idlib who will want to know why the Idlib plan cannot be implemented. There are 18 million voices in Syria who want the Council to act to protect them.

A lot has been said today, some of it very familiar or common to those Council members who have spoken. I will not repeat some of the assessments, but I would like to go on record as saying that the United Kingdom agrees with our American, Dutch, Swedish, Polish and other partners in their assessments. We wholly agree with them.

I want to highlight in particular four points: first of all, I want to agree with what the representative of France said about the situation on the ground, but also what he said about the French, Americans and British taking our responsibilities if chemical weapons are ever used again. I want to talk about the political process: we want to see the constitutional committee convened. We look to the Special Envoy to do that. We believe he has all the authority he needs to pick the names and we trust him to do the best he can in the interests of the people of Syria and in the interest of peace. We look for a date at to be set and we ask him to report back to the Council by 31 October. We look to the small group and the Astana group to make progress on coming together in support of the United Nations. I agree with what my Dutch and Swedish colleagues said about reconstruction money. There are 3 million voices in Idlib, and 18 million voices in Syria as a whole, who will want to know why progress cannot be made on the political track.

Turning to the humanitarian front, we would like to hear from the Syrian representative why there are still problems with access and why there are still problems with safe passage, as mentioned by the Under-Secretary-General. I note what the representative of Equatorial Guinea said about scorched earth. It is a truly terrible situation, but he is right to draw attention to it. We would like to know what the Syrian regime is doing to put that right. A large number of speakers talked about international humanitarian law and the principles of precaution, discrimination and proportionality. The United Kingdom absolutely upholds those principles. It is unbelievable that hospitals are being attacked, and even more unbelievable given that they are part of a deconflicted area. Last week, the United Kingdom announced approximately $40 million for Idlib. We hope that will help, but I want to go back to what the Under-Secretary-General asked — is it a reprieve or a stay of execution? It is a dreadful choice, but it has to be a reprieve. There are 3 million voices in Idlib and

18 million voices in Syria who will want to know why this cannot happen.

Turning to the wider issues, as awful and horrific as the Syrian conflict is, the prospect of a wider, inter-State war is waiting in the wings. The Syrian people are not only being attacked by their own Government, they risk being drawn in and becoming the victims of a wider conflict. It is not legitimate to use the territory of Syria to fire missiles at Israel. The risk of miscalculation and misunderstanding that led to the downing of a Russian aircraft encapsulates, on a small scale, the much bigger and even more frightening risk of a wider miscalculation.

In that regard, I would like to echo other colleagues who have voiced their condolences to our Russian colleagues for the loss of their air crew. I repeat, however, that the risk of miscalculation is incredibly high. It was the Syrian Arab air force that shot down the Russian plane, and the proximate cause was the actions of Iran and Hizbullah on the ground. That ought to serve as a very powerful warning, not just to the Syrian authorities but also to the Russians and the Iranians of the prospect of something much wider and even more horrible than we have seen thus far in Syria.

Lastly, the Special Envoy referred to Kofi Annan, and we will have a tribute to Mr. Annan in the United Nations later this week. This morning, a wreath was laid to Dag Hammarskjöld, who is also one of the iconic Secretaries-General whom the United Nations has been fortunate enough to have lead it. We do them no credit if we allow this conflict to continue. In 2012, I was present for the historic Geneva II Conference on Syria. The best legacy we can offer Mr. Annan in response to all his work is to bring the Syrian conflict to an end and help the Syrian people.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for their informative briefings. My delegation reiterate its appreciation and support for their sensitive work.

We also express our condolences to the Government and the people of Russia for the loss of lives during yesterday's incident.

We are meeting once again to discuss the sensitive issue of the current and future situation of the Syrian people. However, we stress that, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/845), military activity in the south-west has decreased as a result of the Government recovering territory held by armed groups and its consolidation of control in that region. However, we insist that the parties must respect their obligations under international law, particularly international humanitarian law, in order to ensure the protection of civilians, hospitals and educational institutions, as well as to protect the workers of the various humanitarian agencies on the ground.

Part of that protection must go hand in hand with the prompt and active clearance of explosive remnants of war throughout Syrian territory, beginning with densely populated areas. We consider that to be an urgent and fundamental action, since those remnants pose a risk to medical and humanitarian personnel and, most critically, to the civilians who are returning to their places of origin.

We underscore that in eastern Ghouta during the latest reporting period, according to the Secretary-General's most recent report, many displaced persons were able to return to their homes and resume their normal lives and even commercial activities. We also note that, according to the report, the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations have been able to reach more than 2.37 million people with food assistance, as well as with medicines to some hard-to-reach areas. We stress the need to include in the agenda the release of people detained and kidnapped by terrorist groups, as well as the identification of the bodies of victims of violence in the conflict.

We insist on the need to ensure the protection of the 2.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the province of Idlib, including the 1.4 million internally displaced persons. We also reiterate our deep concern about the possible escalation of violence in Idlib governorate, where there are approximately 3 million people, including the regrettable presence of almost 80,000 members of non-State armed groups and terrorist groups, designated as such by the Council. Bolivia takes this opportunity to reiterate its categorical rejection of all acts of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, wherever, whenever and by whomever it is committed.

We believe that any effort or measure taken within the framework of resolution 2401 (2018) that provides for the fight against terrorist groups designated by the Council, or other armed groups, in order to separate

them from the civilian population must also consider the protection of civilian lives under international law. In that connection, we welcome the agreement reached hours ago at the highest levels between Russia and Turkey in Sochi. That agreement will enable the removal of all radical combatants from Idlib, including the Al-Nusra Front, which has links to Al-Qaida, and heavy weaponry belonging to all armed groups.

We highlight the initiatives of the Astana guarantors to reduce violence throughout the Syrian territory. That is why we must strengthen the Astana agreements, one of the international initiatives that helped to reduce violence and facilitate peace and stability in Syria. In that regard, we call upon the parties to continue working for the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), while highlighting once again that those local agreements helped not only to reduce violence and allow the evacuation of people in need, but also to facilitate the arrival of humanitarian assistance. We hope that those agreements will continue with the aim of allowing access for convoys, including cross-border convoys, emergency medical evacuations and humanitarian corridors that will enable the voluntary, unhindered, dignified and safe movement of civilians to their places of origin.

We reiterate our support for the efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura and for his talks with the various stakeholders in the framework of the high-level diplomacy. We repeat that the Syrian conflict has no military solution, and we therefore reject any attempt at break-up or sectarianism in the country. On the contrary, we wish to state that the solution is to sustain and implement the Sochi final declaration, whose main aim is the establishment of a constitutional committee. We hope that Mr. De Mistura's efforts in that regard will bear fruit.

Within the framework of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and respect for the principle of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, we call for the resolution of this conflict through an inclusive political process, based on dialogue and consultations, led by and for the Syrian people and allowing for a peaceful and sustainable solution to the situation within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva process.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I should like to extend our gratitude to all of those delegations that have voiced their condolences in connection with the tragedy that occurred yesterday in the skies over Syria.

We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their briefings.

Yesterday, in Sochi, yet another historic milestone was achieved with respect to developments in the situation in Syria, namely, the Russian-Turkish summit, which resulted in the signing of a memorandum on stabilizing the situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone. Together with our Turkish partners, we will submit that document for distribution as an official document of the Security Council.

Key components of the memorandum include maintenance of the de-escalation zone and the establishment within it a demilitarized zone that will help carry out focused work to ensure a sustained cessation of hostilities. At the same time, it confirms the determination to continue fighting terrorism in Syria in all its forms and manifestations. Uncompromising and consistent struggle against terrorism remains among the chief obligations of all States Members of the United Nations.

The document is a confirmation that Russia, together with other Astana guarantors, continues to undertake tremendous efforts to ensure that the situation around Idlib will be resolved through negotiations and that the civilian population will not suffer, as we described to our partners and have been describing all of this time. Efforts aimed at seeking an optimal solution will continue. Regardless of what some may state due to envy or from mere impotence, the Astana format remains a functional and effective mechanism. We thank our Kazakh colleagues for their contribution to its establishment.

On the whole, our view is that the situation on the ground has set the stage for a meaningful political process. That, too, is largely to the credit of the Astana trio. We will persevere in our efforts aimed at facilitating the establishment of a constitutional committee made up of representatives of the Syrian leadership, opposition forces and civil society. The challenge and objective is to ensure the beginning of the committee's work as soon as possible.

We call for attempts at destructive intervention in this sensitive process to be abandoned and for attempts to impose contrived, ill-conceived configurations to be set aside. They only slow down the formulation of

balanced solutions and undermine the achievement of a sustained, lasting settlement.

I wish to tell Mr. De Mistura that it is perhaps not worth using the Security Council to exert pressure on the guarantors. They are doing more for the political process than anybody present in the Chamber. It is important for him to facilitate — and not to lead — the process. Syrian decisions need to be owned by the Syrian people themselves, as is stipulated under resolution 2254 (2015), to which we all, including Mr. De Mistura, frequently refer.

We call upon all those who do not intend to make progress on scenarios in a way that runs counter to the genuine desires of the Syrian people, who do not intend to embroil themselves in political engineering, to help, or at least not obstruct, the activities of the guarantor countries of the Astana process designed to launch what is necessary for Syria, the Middle East region and the entire international community, namely, a comprehensive political process based on the decisions of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue in Sochi and Security Council resolutions on Syria.

Our approaches to tackling humanitarian issues in Syria remain unchanged. We believe that it is unseemly, to put it mildly, to selectively approach the delivery of assistance to the Syrian population. It is unacceptable to blatantly politicize issues pertaining to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the rebuilding of what was destroyed by terrorists, upholding the inalienable right of refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their homes.

Unfortunately, unbalanced policies in Syrian affairs emerge more often than not. In particular, having read the report of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation in Syria, we have been unable to find anything about issues pertaining to access by humanitarian workers to a number of areas beyond the control of Damascus, including those occupied by the coalition in breach of Syria's sovereignty. There has been no mention of what took place, and what continues to take place, in Raqqa. Yet it is known that the bodies of the dead are still being retrieved from under the rubble after the so-called coalition razed the city to the ground, having liberated it from terrorists and, while they were at it, from civilians. I do not recall a call for the protection of refugees being issued at that time. Apparently, some have a selective approach to humanitarian affairs.

There has been no progress in delivering vital supplies to the residents of the Rukban camp, which is located in an enclosed zone around the United States At Tanf military base. Indeed, Mr. Lowcock mentioned both Raqqa and Rukban in his briefing. Once again, we would draw attention to the fact that the value of the conduct of cross-border operations in the light of developments on the ground has been exaggerated. This is a mechanism that has been introduced as an extraordinary measure. It is not transparent and blatantly undermines Syria's sovereignty. It is important to move towards its eventual drawdown. It is also important to promptly rebuild the Syrian economy, and especially areas most severely affected by the hostilities there. It is necessary to eschew double standards and politically tinged conditions. Many reject such approaches. That was confirmed during last week's sixtieth annual Damascus International Fair with the participation of official representatives and companies from 48 States.

It is high time to acknowledge the fact that unilateral sanctions imposed by a number of States undermine, not the regime, as they have called it, but are detrimental above all to ordinary Syrian citizens. This is a vicious and counterproductive practice, not only in the Syrian context but in other contexts as well.

The Russian Federation will continue to provide assistance to Syria on the political and humanitarian fronts. With the assistance of the Russian Centre for Refugee Reception, Distribution and Settlement, Syrians continue to return from Lebanon and Jordan. Overall, since 18 July, approximately 13,500 refugees have returned to Syria, and 243,000 people have returned since 30 September 2015. Furthermore, since 1 January, about 149,000 internally displaced persons have returned to their homes, and since 30 September 2015, 1.2 million people have returned.

Furthermore, the Syrian authorities are implementing socioeconomic measures geared towards generating momentum for rebuilding key infrastructure in the country. Those measures also aim to continue the delivery of comprehensive humanitarian assistance to civilians. Since September 2015, about 30,000 residential structures have been rebuilt or renovated, as well as more than 5,000 educational and 150 medical institutions. For our part, during that period, Russia organized and conducted 1,935 humanitarian operations, during which over 3,000 tons of food and basic necessities were provided and distributed. Russian

military medical personnel delivered assistance to approximately 93,500 Syrians.

Despite the general trend towards greater stabilization, the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic on the whole remains tense. Fighters continue to intensively shell Syrian army positions and residential areas in Government-controlled territory from the Idlib de-escalation zone. In August, there were 554 violations of the cessation-of-hostilities regime by illegal armed groups with the use of mortars, anti-aircraft and heavy machine guns, as a result of which 29 people were killed and 71 were wounded.

As a consequence of terrorist bombardments, civilians continue to perish. On 7 September, terrorists using multiple-launch rocket systems in Maharda killed nine civilians, including five women and three children. Approximately 30 people were wounded. On 13 September, when terrorists used improvised launchers in Aleppo, a child was killed and 13 people were injured.

At the same time, fighters continue to launch unmanned attack aerial vehicles in the direction of the Russian Khmeimim air base. Since July, Russian air defence has destroyed 58 such drones. In addition, the Idlib de-escalation zone fighters and White Helmet activists continue preparations with a view to staging the use of chemical weapons. There is information that such fabrications were already filmed in Jisr ash-Shagur and Khan Shaykhoun. Syrians, including [illegible] abducted from Idlib and Aleppo, were forced to participate. There is also evidence that the Al-Nusra Front recently provided barrels of chlorine to Jaysh [illegible] in Al-Lataminah, and Kafr Zita. We once again draw attention to that fact, about which we have repeatedly warned.

The fighters' activities are [illegible] led from abroad, and that is also being reinforced in the light of blatant disregard for Syria's sovereignty, which Damascus has a legitimate right to protect through the means available to it, by those who advocate a [illegible] ible peace process.

Facilitating extremists, [illegible] even indirectly, is unacceptable. We note that those who became involved in the Syrian crisis are finally realizing the mistake of relying on extremists. Some States have initiated relevant proceedings to clarify the role of certain [illegible] in supporting groups that had tarnished themselves by cooperating with terrorists and through their numerous violations of international humanitarian law. We hope that those proceedings will be carried through to their logical conclusion.

We heard concerns today that the Syrian conflict is liable to lead to more serious regional consequences. That is also a concern to us, and we see that some of our partners are using Syria as a springboard to unleash more dangerous conflict with far-reaching, unpredictable consequences. In that connection, we would like to call once again for genuinely collective efforts to be carried out with regard to all conflicts in the region, especially along counter-terrorism lines, and to abandon attempts to resolve issues in Syria behind Syria's back.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my sincere condolences to my dear friend and colleague the Ambassador of the Russian Federation for yesterday's victims martyred as a result of the Israeli aggression against the city of Latakia. The martyrs of Russia in Syria are our martyrs. Their blood is our blood. We share the same enemy and the same victory against the same kind of terrorism. We, together with our allies, are partners in the counter-terrorism strategy in Syria, the region and the world in word and in deed.

We condemn Israel's most recent aggression against my country, which was carried out last night. It is part of Israel's aggressive policy and desperate attempt to provide moral support to terrorist groups following their defeat at the hands of the Syrian Arab Army and after cleansing the Syrian territories from their abomination. That comes after the repeated and continued provocative Israeli violations of the disengagement agreement of 1974 and the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 350 (1974). My country calls on the Security Council once again to assume its responsibility in maintaining international peace and security and to immediately take the necessary and decisive measures to hold Israel accountable for its terrorism and its crimes, which constitute a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law.

I was deeply disappointed, but not surprised, to note that there was no mention of two elements in the briefings on the humanitarian and the political situation in Syria provided by the Under-Secretary-General and the Special Envoy. Neither of them mentioned the subversive Israeli role in Syria or the terrorist groups

operating in my country. That was despite the fact that my dear friend, Mr. De Mistura, knows well that we agreed in Geneva on four baskets that constitute our agenda, one of them is terrorism. Therefore, it is unacceptable that Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Lowcock do not mention either foreign or domestic terrorism, which is operative in my country. As Council members know, Israel attacked my country twice this week. However, it seems that some members of the Council were not aware of those two acts of Israeli aggression.

Some permanent Council members continue to disregard the information that we have been providing to the Council for more than seven and a half years. They continue to distort the facts. That is unprecedented. I will not do what the representatives of those States are doing. I will not fabricate stories. I will not make arbitrary accusations. And I will not use illegal ,desperate and miserable expressions. Rather, I will use the words of their officials and members of their Governments against them.

I would like to remind my colleague the representative of France of a statement made by Mr. Roland Dumas, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, on the French television channel La Chaîne Parlementaire in June 2013:

> "Just about two years ago, before the hostilities in Syria began, I happened to be in England ... where I met with British officials, some of them friends of mine, who had sought me out and told me that something was being planned for Syria ... that the United Kingdom was preparing a rebel invasion of Syria ... The operation was long in the making. It was arranged, conceived and organized with the very plain goal of removing the Syrian Government."

Mr. Dumas also said,

> "It is important to know, when it comes to this region, that the Syrian regime has anti-Israeli intentions. Consequently, everything that happens in the region [hinges on that]. The Prime Minister of Israel told me, 'We are trying to get along with the countries around us, but those with which we can't we will bring down'."

That happened in 2010, before the Arab Spring, the African Autumn and the Asian Summer.

(*spoke in French*)

That was another France. It was the France of François Mitterrand. It was the France of Dominique de Villepin. It was the France of Jean-Pierre Chevènement. And it was the France of Roland Dumas.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

That is one testimony. I will give the Council another one that is equally important. It is a statement made by Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, former Chief of Staff to United States Secretary of State Colin Powell. In a statement to the Real News Network on 11 September, just a couple of days ago, he stated,

> "Those who are calling for aggression against Syria are looking for any kind of excuse to justify such aggression. Syria will be their next target, after Iraq. Their ultimate goal would be to topple the Iranian Government."

Colonel Wilkerson went on to say,

> "My country, along with Britain and France, does not have any evidence that the Syrian Government used chemical weapons at any time in the past. Moreover, the United States intelligence officers, including those working illegally in Syri.., were not able to provide any evidence to substantiate their allegations. To the contrary, all available evidence points to the fact that terrorist groups were those that used chemical weapons and carried out such attacks."

That is yet another testimony.

(*spoke in English*)

Once again, it was a different America — that of Colin Powell and Colonel Wilkerson.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Those Governments sought to start a war against my country, Syria, to force its Government to change its positions, policies and national identity in service of a new Middle East. According to that plan, new and warring countries will be established on religious, faith-based, sectarian and ethnic grounds, just like the Zionist project of a Jewish Israel, in order to deprive the Palestinian people of their right to creating their own independent State. After all, only Israel matters.

In order to protect the lives of Syrians, there must be cooperation with the Syrian Government

and support to counter terrorism, instead of allowing Western intelligence officers to support terrorist groups through the use of deceptive terms, including, for example, "moderate armed Syrian opposition", "non-State armed groups", "the Islamic Caliphate State" or "jihadist groups". None of those terms include the word "terrorist", as if there were no terrorism in Syria, only genetically modified moderate armed Syrian opposition. We have those from Uzbekistan, Turkistan, China, Chechnya, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Europe. However, they are all genetically modified armed Syrian opposition.

Let me read out a statement made last week by the French Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, on the news channel BFM TV.

> "The attack by the Syrian army against Idlib might have direct implications for the security of Europe."

That statement was also confirmed by the representative of France a while ago. The Foreign Minister continued,

> "This threat might be the result of terrorists spreading out across the region and moving to Europe. This security threat will remain as long as there are many terrorists from Al-Qaida operating in this region. They number between 10,000 and 15,000 and might be a direct threat to the security of our region in the future."

I ask my colleague the representative of France: Why has the French Government continued to provide political cover for terrorist groups in Syria, despite the fact that such groups carried out attacks in Paris at the Bataclan theatre and in Nice?

I will provide another example, which might be of interest to my colleague the representative of the Netherlands. As my colleagues in the Council know, a few days ago our delegation provided them with some serious information that was published by the Dutch media. The Dutch Government has provided support, funding and logistical assistance to a number of terrorist groups in Syria, despite the fact that the Dutch Public Prosecutor designated them as terrorist groups affiliated with jihadist and Salafist groups. It seems that there is some disagreement between the Government and the Public Prosecutor of the Netherlands on that issue. I ask the representative of the Netherlands: Does such action by the Dutch Government not violate its responsibilities as a member of the Security Council, especially when it pertains to maintaining international peace and security?

To those who continue to boast about interfering in my country, I reiterate that we will keep working seriously to achieve a political solution through a Syrian-led dialogue, without foreign interference. Our priority throughout the political process will remain counter-terrorism, ensuring the return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons, the start of the reconstruction and recovery process and liberating all remaining Syrian territories from terrorists and illegal occupying Powers.

In that regard, I would like to ask Mr. Lowcock, who strangely stated that he would need the approval of the Syrian Government to deliver humanitarian assistance to the Rukban camp: Why did he not mention that the United States occupying Power at the Al-Tanaf camp refused to allow humanitarian convoys to reach the Rukban camp and stipulated that aid convoys should be unloaded 10 kilometres away from the camp? Why did he not say that?

Pertaining to the constitutional committee, the Syrian Government has fulfilled its commitment, as stated by Mr. De Mistura that we have provided a list of participants.

The Syrian Government would like to thank Russia and Iran for the efforts of their Presidents during the most recent summit in Tehran. The Syrian Arab Republic welcomes the agreement reached on Idlib province, announced yesterday in the Russian city of Sochi. The Syrian Government underscores that the agreement was the result of intense consultations between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation, with full coordination between the two countries. The Syrian Government is never the last to be consulted. No one can sidestep the Syrian Government in that regard.

The Syrian Arab Republic continues to welcome all initiatives to stop the bloodshed and restore stability and security in all areas affected by terrorism. We will continue our war against terrorism until we liberate all Syrian territories, whether through military action or local reconciliation agreements. Such agreements have proved to be successful in stopping the bloodshed and restoring stability and security in the areas concerned, while allowing refugees to return to their homes.

In response to the statement made by my colleague the British Ambassador, the agreement announced yesterday is time-bound with clear deadlines. The agreement is a part of previous agreements on de-escalation zones, established by the Astana process since the beginning of 2017. The Astana process has always been committed to respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of the Syrian Arab Republic, while liberating all Syrian territories from terrorism, terrorists and illegal foreign military presence.

In conclusion, I would like to respond to my colleague the Permanent Representative of Britain, who asked what action "the Syrian regime" was taking to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance. What kind of question is that? There is no representative of the Syrian regime in the Security Council, or at the United Nations. I am the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic. I would ask the representative of the United Kingdom not to address a question to a fictitious person. I do not know such a person, to whom I referred to as Godot the last time (see S/PV.8344). There is no representative of Syrian regime at the United Nations, there is a representative of the Syrian Arab Republic and there is the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The President: I would like to remind speakers of our standard of a five-minute time limit for statements.

I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): At the outset, let me join others in offering our condolences to our Russian friends for their loss yesterday.

As the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation explained, the summit between the Turkish and Russian Presidents in Sochi yesterday focused on the situation in Idlib. I would also like to share our views on the outcome of the summit.

First, I would like to recall President Erdoğan's article in *The Wall Street Journal*, to which I referred here in the Chamber on 11 September (see S/PV.8347):

> "Idlib is the last exit before the toll. If the international community ... fails to take action now, not only innocent civilians but the entire world stands to pay the price."

With that awareness, President Erdoğan and President Putin met in Sochi yesterday. The summit was an expression of their determination to find a peaceful solution to address a major humanitarian disaster in Idlib. The summit offered an opportunity to discuss ways and means to implement the understanding reached in Tehran last Friday, in line with the Astana spirit of cooperation. The agreement reached in Sochi builds on the Astana de-escalation arrangement and aims to achieve the stabilization of the situation and preserve the de-escalation zone in Idlib; the creation of the necessary conditions to fight terrorism effectively, in line with international humanitarian law; the prevention of a humanitarian catastrophe; and paving the way for the advancement of the political process.

The memorandum of understanding, which we will circulate together with our Russian friends, was signed by the Turkish and Russian Defence Ministers yesterday and foresees the creation of a demilitarized zone. The two sides agreed to continue working on the details of that arrangement. In line with the memorandum of understanding, all heavy weaponry will be withdrawn from the zone by 10 October; all terrorist groups will be removed by 15 October; the existing Turkish observation posts will be fortified; Russia will take all the necessary measures to prevent military operations and attacks on Idlib; Turkey and Russia will conduct coordinated patrols on both sides of the demilitarized zone; the coordination centre for the Astana guarantors will be reinforced in order to strengthen the sustainability of the ceasefire regime; and additional measures will be taken to ensure the freedom of movement of people and goods.

In his briefing, Under-Secretary-General Lowcock once again depicted the dire humanitarian situation in Idlib. The memorandum of understanding primarily aims at averting the looming humanitarian tragedy that the people in Idlib are facing. That arrangement will not only prevent a military attack on Idlib, but also serve the ultimate goal of accelerating both the political process and the finding a negotiated solution in Syria.

As mentioned by Special Envoy De Mistura, efforts to finalize the constitutional committee are under way. Turkey hopes to see an acceleration of efforts for the establishment of an inclusive and credible committee, for the holding of free and fair elections under United Nations supervision and for the Syrian people's legitimate aspirations for a democratic future in line with resolution 2254 (2015) to be addressed. We reiterate our call to the Council and the overall international community to support our endeavours and expedite the political process. Our collective efforts to

fight terrorism will contribute to the creation of viable conditions to that end.

In Sochi, the Turkish and Russian Presidents reaffirmed their resolve to fight terrorism in Idlib and beyond. We will continue to combat all terrorist groups, including the Democratic Union Party and the Kurdish People's Protection Units, which seek to undermine the territorial integrity of Syria and represent a direct threat to Turkey's national security. That should be a common source of concern shared by all of us.

As I underlined before the Council on 11 September, the international community must shoulder its responsibility and throw its weight behind a political solution. Millions of Syrians who have suffered tremendously are putting their faith in us. They deserve a better future. They deserve to shape the future of their homeland. We should not, and cannot, fail them.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to begin by expressing our condolences to the Russian delegation over the loss of Russian lives in the recent tragic events in Syria.

I would also like to express my thanks and appreciation to Mr. De Mistura and Mr. Lowcock for their efforts, as well as their briefings today.

The Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes the agreement between Russia and Turkey to create a demilitarized buffer zone in the governorate of Idlib in Syria. The Sochi agreement is the result of intensive, responsible diplomacy over the past few weeks in Ankara and Damascus, followed by the Iran-Russia-Turkey summit in Tehran. The agreement is based on the Astana process principled approach and spirit in creating de-escalation zones in order to reduce the possibility of civilian casualties, while fighting terrorism.

Stopping violence and bloodshed, while eliminating terrorism in the area, is one the most basic and principled positions in Iran's foreign policy. As President Rouhani stressed during the Tehran summit, combating terrorism requires a comprehensive approach by taking into account all aspects of that unpleasant phenomenon. From that perspective, the fight against terrorism in Idlib is an integral part of the mission of restoring peace and stability to Syria, but that fight must not harm civilians.

The Russian-Turkish agreement is a step in the right direction. It is in line with the determination expressed by the Presidents of Iran, Russia and Turkey in Tehran to continue cooperating with a view to eliminating all terrorists, while taking into consideration the humanitarian aspects. As during the Tehran summit, the three leaders expressed their strong commitment to Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. That will enable Syria to restore its control over other parts of its territory. Like any other State, that is its inherent right.

The international community should welcome that agreement and positively contribute to its implementation. We hope that the agreement — within the framework of the positive and successful Astana process and in continuation of the recent Tehran summit and diplomatic efforts by Iran — will quickly help end disasters for the Syrian people and cleanse the country of violent elements, while taking into account humanitarian concerns.

Once again, we stress the need for the return of all refugees and internally displaced persons. That will undoubtedly contribute to the ceasefire and national dialogue and accelerate the reconciliation process; it is also critical in advancing a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. The right to determine the future of Syria belongs exclusively to Syrians.

To that end, cooperation towards establishing and launching the work of the constitutional committee is critical. While Syria is passing through a critical stage in defeating terrorists and regaining its unity and territorial integrity, the international community should stand firm in breathing new life into the country. As the Islamic Republic of Iran supported Syria in defeating terrorists, it will play a constructive role in bringing peace and prosperity to the country.

In conclusion, with regard to the allegations of the United States representative, I must stress that they reflect onlly endeavours to cover up the failure of United States polices in Syria.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.